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MENCKEN AND SHAW

BOOKS BY
BENJAMIN DE CASSERES

The Shadow-Eater
Chameleon
Forty Immortals
James Gibbons Huneker
Anathema!
Mirrors of New York
The Superman in America

MENCKEN AND SHAW

THE ANATOMY OF AMERICA'S VOLTAIRE AND ENGLAND'S OTHER JOHN *BULL*

BY

BENJAMIN DE CASSERES

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TO

NANCY O'REILLY

WHO FIRST SUGGESTED PUTTING
BETWEEN THE SAME COVERS
THE FABRE OF THE AMERICAN INSECT
AND
THE IRISH DISCIPLE OF
THE URANIAN VENUS

FOREWORD

H. L. MENCKEN and George Bernard Shaw are the two outstanding polemical and controversial writers of the Anglo-American world.

I have put them in the same book by way of contrast. Mencken is a rare type of American intellectual honesty and prejudiced sincerity. Shaw is a commonplace type of democratic hypocrisy and publicity shark.

Mencken is an Individualist—that is, he is opposed to everything that is not pro-Mencken. (And by the word Mencken I here mean any other man. For an Individualist says, "My Ego against the world!")

Shaw is mass-minded, mob-minded, gutter-minded. He has wit but no brains.

Shaw is one of the worst types

that the democratic movement has spawned. Mencken is one of the highest types that this movement has spawned because he represents a passionate reaction against it.

The speciousness of Shaw is a deliberate, conscious, simpering speciousness written in order to provoke attack for publicity purposes.

The speciousness of Mencken is the speciousness inherent in every form of personal reasoning and personal feeling (and what reasoning and emotional experience is not personal?). It is the inevitable speciousness of universal scepticism and our ignorance of ultimates.

In a word, then, the difference between Mencken and Shaw is the difference between a man with character and a man who has none.

No matter how much I herein differ with Mencken, I always regard him as an intellectual pal. We see the same facts through

entirely different temperaments. But I nowhere question—it would not be possible—the utter, the blatant sincerity and honesty of the matter that flows from his special sensibility.

On the other hand, I treat Shaw as a buffoon, as a rare primate in the democratic zoo.

There is a tragic note in Mencken's most comic and tricksy moods. Shaw has nothing of the tragic or pathetic in his nature. He is sheer charlatan.

Mencken may be Jupiter Tonans or Jupiter Eulenspiegel. But he is always a Jupiter. Shaw is always Jupiter Cagliostro.

There is no attempt here to "appraise" Mencken. I am not a critic (I loathe the word in its picking-fly-dirt-out-of-black-pepper connotation). I am a gustatorian. A gustatorian is a critic whose judgments are founded on spontaneous, intuitional taste and who does not analyze or weigh, but apotheosizes or slays.

In these notes on Mencken I sometimes apotheosize and sometimes slay, to both of which ceremonials he will probably remain impervious, as befits such a veteran of gymnopædic nouns, adjectives and adverbs.

The Mencken has never before been published and is here set down just as it was originally written while reading his books. The five chapters on Shaw were originally published in the New York *World,* the *Theatre Magazine* and the *American Sketch,* to whom acknowledgment is here made for permission to reprint.

BENJAMIN DE CASSERES.

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THE ANATOMY OF MENCKEN

No man ever quite believes in any other man.

—H. L. Mencken.

1

LUCKY for us Mencken was born in America. If he had been born in Germany I fear his admiration for and harmonious reaction to the Fatherland would have made of him just another bookish scholar or, at most, a monstrous archive-worm like Spengler. In America the hereditary bookworm in him became a rattler.

2

Twenty years ago Mencken was dismissed as a "clown." He is today a tremendously vital and dangerous national figure. What has happened? Mencken came full-grown. He has not changed a bit; he has not "evolved." It is the public mind that has evolved. Even a moron like the late Stuart Sherman underwent a reversal in regard to Menck-

en, not because Mencken had changed an iota, but because even the Piltdown culture of Sherman could no longer ignore him. And Sherman is the public that I speak of which dismissed him as a clown.

In this matter, I will here go into the confessional. Twenty years ago I did not see the importance or stature of Mencken. His intense realism and this-worldliness flabbergasted me. I enjoyed his style, but was always looking for a poetical-mystical content that simply was not in or of Mencken. In a word, my own social consciousness (my social rebellion) had not then fully crystallized. I was all cosmic rebellion. I was not anti-Rotary. I was anti-God. Mencken was defective on my side, and I was defective on his. Mencken was concerned with man and his relation to society. I was concerned with God and his attitude (if any) toward man.

It was the war that did for me precisely what it did for Bertrand Russell. It blew me out of my ivory tower. I was, after all, a social being. And, curiously enough, it was Mencken (who was at opposite poles with me on the war, as I am and always will be pro-Latin) and his savage attitude toward the whole

American scene directly after the war that did a great deal to bring me down to earth (but I fret for my cloud-towers and cosmic star-preserves, where I really live) and made me see the importance of such a man as Mencken in regard to the American scene.

From that time he has been growing in stature, and still grows. His world is not the real world. But that's precisely what he would say about my world. He does not diminish my world, and certainly my world has no effect on him.

3

Such withering contempt for the "inferior man" as he exhibits could only arise from Christian pity. A pagan or an æsthete-aristocrat simply does not admit that the lower classes exist. The rise of the dear-brethren consciousness and Christianity was co-eval. We are all tarred. Our atavistic aristocratic tendencies are our struggles to get out of the pigsty.

4

By his advocacy and cheer leadership of the "realistic document," his hat-

tossing over Dreiser, Sherwood Anderson, Sinclair Lewis, Willa Cather, Ruth Suckow and that kidney he has helped to destroy real literature (or the magic and the art of beautiful writing) in the United States. His dislike of writing for Beauty's sake would be almost philistine if it were not saved by his Rabelaisian robustiousness.

5

It has been said of Mencken that he is psychologically a Methodist tub-thumper, a fanatic *à rebours*. This might be said of any highly vitalized individual and embattled sensibility. The *direction* of fury is the thing that matters. A Nietzsche reversed is a John Wesley. A Jonathan Edwards reversed is a Bolshevist atheist. Mencken reversed might be a Billy Sunday—but the important point is this: Mencken is *not* reversed!

6

A sceptic is a non-valuer, an indifferentist, a Pyrrhonist. Now, Mencken, no matter what he says about it, is not a sceptic. He has profound and absolute beliefs. The fury

of his cynicism and irony proves it. Dare Mencken ferret in his own spiritual guts? Hell!—he's a Spartan, something of a saint. He must believe in a God that is beyond good-and-evil (by God I mean an intelligent, unhuman Directive Energy), but, like all congenital materialists, he will not face It. (It takes tremendous courage to believe in, *to love* my God, Spinoza's God: an unhuman, satanic-æsthetic Being.)

7

When you carry on a serious discussion or argument with Mencken you must talk by the book. "For instance, where, who, what?" He has an ineradicable mistrust of first-hand (intuitive) men. He probably looks on the Mayo brothers and Professor Loeb as far more important than Walt Whitman or Thoreau, while to me the former are of no great importance.

8

He is of that small band in the world that needs neither government nor church, policeman nor the dotted line for his

word. Honesty, Decency, Pride: a trinity for those who stand alone. They solve all spiritual problems.

9

No appeal can ever be made to Mencken's imagination. As a matter of fact, I cannot discover in him a trace of imagination. He loves romance, or, at least, realistic romance, psychological romance—witness his almost adoring attitude before Joseph Conrad. He insists on a groundwork of solid thought—grey matter—in all works of art.

To him Pegasus is just a runaway horse. There isn't the trace of a wing on his brain. This is his strength. He is seamless, solid, of a piece, a romantic realist at the most, testing and tasting life with an enormous gusto: a Balzac of facts.

10

There is a naïveté in his style that is almost a keynote.

11

There is an impish friendliness about the man, as who should say, "I'd go to

hell for you personally if for no other reason than to toss that rubbish you write into a latrine down there!"

12

Mencken said to me, one day, after telling me of some experiments of Professor Loeb, that he believed science would be able to "create life" within twenty-five years. What he meant, of course, was that some one some day might manufacture life. Life cannot be created, is never created. We can manufacture ice, but no one can create it.

But why science should bother about manufacturing life when any girl and boy can do the job on a couch passes my understanding. The Scientific Spirit is full of these pretty *ennuis*. One of them takes the form of boredom with Nature's slow processes. These Loebs have the juvenile play-instinct which they believe to be Promethean.

Mencken's "amiable scepticism" was not at home, I fear me, when he triumphantly announced that Loeb, or some one, would "create life." I saw, at that moment, the old-fashioned fundamentalist atheist saying,

"Ha-ha!—we'll show you yet there's no God!" *Quelle crédulité!*—"create life." Tricks!, Henry, all tricks!

13

Mencken is so completely civilized that he will not even reply to his critics. He turns the other cheek to them, and with impudent boyishness says, "Smack this one!" He is the only man I know who subtly reconciles two of Christ's heretofore irreconcilable sayings—to turn the other cheek and I bring not peace, but a sword.

14

He who has denounced human credulity as the cardinal sin of the race pullulates with credulities. He believes in progress—that man arises from lower to higher—thus implying a belief in Plan, Purpose and an intelligent direction behind human evolution, for progress is plainly inconceivable without movement to some given point, and this given point must be somewhere existent in a Mind. There is also a credulous belief in Science, in proof, in fact, in logic, in empirical utilitarianism.

The fact that Science is often more superstitious, more credulous, than pure religion would probably not be admitted by Mencken. His credulities—his immense faith in human reason—are merely sublimated transformations of religious and mystical credulities. Reason is Mencken's Holy Ghost. He says in his "Treatise on the Gods" that in regard to fundamentals his position is one of "amiable scepticism." Now, this very attitude of amiable scepticism is a perfect breeding-ground for every kind of belief. The sceptical attitude itself (and scepticism is always more verbal than real: I can attest the truth of that in my own experience) is an act of faith. "I do not know" is a colossal affirmation which posits the absolute reality of the I.

Thus not only is credulity the very life and core of Mencken's thought, but it is a condition of life itself. As a matter of fact, we, all of us, like Mencken, choose that form of credulity which makes us happiest.

15

To Mencken, God is merely the Irving Babbitt of Heaven: a stuffed shirt.

16

Mencken is the first man in the history of the world to make a monkey of a whole people.

17

He would never question the Sphinx à la Cæsar or Napoleon. He would X-ray it to observe the hormones, take its blood pressure, test its urine and pronounce its silence a purely political dodge.

18

Mencken's humor at its best is the most exquisitely delicate that I know of for an exclusively social and religious satirist. It is a sly and insidious poison that drips from the union of commonplace words—such, for instance, as when he describes a man full of "Christian juices." It is a humor that causes the eye of my mind to twinkle with roguish glee, as doubtless Mencken's mind's eye does when he concocts his ironyms. He is never witty, for wit is spontaneous, a flash out of the subconscious mind. It is irony refined and purified in the

alembics of the conscious mind and tested in the tubes of a kind of impersonal self-consciousness. It sometimes reaches the spot slowly, like a bougie.

19

In the Final Assize he will sit between Swift and Isaiah—and neither Swift nor Isaiah will like it a bit.

20

Mencken, like Walt Whitman, can say (did Walt really say it?): "When you read my book, you are not reading a book but a man."

21

To Mencken ornament in style is like the Whore of Babylon to John the Baptist. He only accepts Cabell because the latter opened the latrines of his ironic heavens on mankind.

22

Has Mencken genius? Not an ounce in the etymological meaning of that

word, unless his innate irony—venomous and devastating—can be called a genie-demon.

23

"A stale Christian bilge ran through his veins" ("Notes on Democracy"). This is as absolute Menckenese as "Let there be light!" is Jehovahese.

24

You have got to prove to Mencken that life is a Mystery. And having proved it, he would want to know the why for the capital M.

25

There is a sort of arrested development about Mencken's mind. How far has he ever got beyond Hæckel, Büchner and Darwin, the Jules Verne, the Oliver Optic and the Horatio Alger of materialism?

26

He confounds intelligence with knowledge—"An intelligent man is one who is capable of taking in knowledge until the nat-

ural limits of the species are reached" ("Notes on Democracy"). That is, that man is most religious who can recite the Bible from end to end. Intelligence and knowledge have very little to do with one another. Knowledge may be the enemy of intelligence. I point to the scholastic and knowledge-crammed dunderpates in our colleges who are called *professors* (and rightly so).

27

"He [*Homo stultus*] has a dreadful capacity for embracing and cherishing impostures" ("Notes on Democracy"). Just now his cherished impostures are scientific—facts—as they are the illusions of Mencken.

28

"And resumes his melancholy heaving of manure" ("Notes on Democracy"). This is out of the deep Mencken vats, and is, besides, a superb sentence, rhythmic and image-evoking.

29

"The democratic man hates the fellow who is having a better time of it in this

world. Such, indeed, is the origin of democracy" ("Notes on Democracy"). The profoundest, the most condensed and the definitive history of the origin of democracy. But that hate is legitimate, for it is caused by the obvious contempt of the man who is having a good time in this world for the fellow who is having a hell of a time. And in the war between Hate and Contempt, Hate will win, of course.

30

The core-greatness of Mencken: I do not tell you what is true or what you should do. I tell you what I like and what I dislike.

31

His tragic defect is his disbelief that anything has insides. But Nature has compensated him for this by giving him eyes—mental eyes—that bore through all externals to the last atom. He is a seer of visibles.

32

Mencken, too, has his clichés, his platitudes, his slogans. One of them is that Wilson was elected in 1916 "on his fraudulent

promise" to keep us out of the war. Wilson made no such promise. Where is it written? As a matter of fact, the German-Americans voted for Hughes to a man. Why? Because Wilson was pro-English and pro-French, not because of any promise.

33

His almost murderous attitude toward those who bullyrag and play the "yokelry" for suckers would argue that he loves the common people with something of the fervor of Marx and Lenin. Machiavelli, Cesare Borgia and Nietzsche were genuine aristocrats. If Mencken despised the democratic swine he would be with their exploiters.

34

Speaking of the boy in his teens, he says, "The sweet passion of love, in these years, is precisely what it is to a tomcat" ("Notes on Democracy"). No such statement was ever made before by an intelligent man. This unbelievably exquisite time in the history of our sex-life—this divine sickness of the flesh and soul—this most memorable and nostalgic

period of our whole life—this blessed island in my emotional life—well, I can only quote Gœthe, "Ye Heavenly Powers, Mencken knows ye not!"

35

I know of no person who is more completely an American and a German at once. He has the bitter moral indignation of the New England Puritan and the congenital reverence for thoroughness and scholarship of the Teuton in almost equal measures. He is a union of Mommsen and Jonathan Edwards: glacial fact-boring and satanic fury.

36

When the Scrolls of Heaven and Earth unravel before our gaze, Mencken will be found making this note: "The Almighty has done a capital job; but the Scrolls are sadly in need of an index and a glossary."

37

If I believed the will to be free, I would say that Mencken is the most heroic figure that America has produced. As it is not free,

I will say he is, with Walt Whitman, the greatest liberating force that this country has produced. If you are going the Open Road to uncompromising self-possessiveness, Whitman and Mencken are all ye need to know.

38

Mencken is as completely lost in the world of the imagination as I am in the world of facts. When he reads me he suffers with sky-sickness. When I read him I suffer with earth-sickness.

39

"His [man's] powerful thirst for the not true" ("Notes on Democracy"). Man creates the "truth" by this thirst. Only the thirst is true; the "not true" and the "true" are both illusions. This "thirst for the not true" is man's greatest asset and glory.

40

He is of such a fierce honesty that I fear he has had to fight many tremendous battles with the primordial universal thief in his soul.

41

He has raised Prejudice to a metaphysic. This is his profoundest and most original contribution to human thought. His universe is entirely subjective. He is, unconsciously, nearer Plotinus than he is to Hæckel or Huxley.

42

Mencken is Gulliver's revenge: he has sprayed the Lilliputians as the Lilliputians did unto Lemuel when the latter was tied to the earth.

43

His style is the completest union of chilled emotion and molten intellect that I know of. Nothing in the whole range of the English language is more condensed, vital, stimulating and direct.

44

Mencken's æsthetic is Good Workmanship. His Muse is Technique.

45

He fits perfectly into his age, his time, his country so far as his method is concerned. He is precisely of this minute: critical, aggressive, logical, scientific and medico-biological. He is only "ahead of his time" in the sense that anybody in any age is who thinks for himself.

46

He has not made any impression at all on the persons and ideas he has attacked because Babbitt and the Boobery are as wise as Mencken, but lack his courage. They know what he says is true, but it is "business"—Rotary and all the rest of it. They, in fact, enjoy Mencken for telling them things that they would not even whisper to their wives—that they are business hypocrites. It is a fact that thousands regard Mencken (and Sinclair Lewis and myself) with as much merriment as we regard them. America is our circus. And we who ridicule it are also amusing clowns to millions of those we ridicule.

47

Mencken has the type of the almost unchangeable mind. Modifications, as in evolution itself, are only effected over long periods of time, and then imperceptibly.

48

Greater joy can come to no man of courage than to make the kind and quantity of enemies he has made.

49

"Notes on Democracy" is the greatest slaughter of the proletariat that ever took place between covers. Mencken is herein the Dr. Guillotine of democracy. It is by far the most original and daring of his books to date, of far greater significance than his "Treatise on the Gods." It is, I believe, the only book he has so far done that will outlive him in spite of its bald, flat, hideous title.

50

I speak of what a man is not in order to emphasize what he is, not in order to

belittle him. The negative side of Mencken's mind enhances the preternatural luminosity of the positive side. Hence, when I say he is destitute of imagination, inspiration, the mystical-poetical gift (to me, the highest endowments) I do not mean he ought to have them. On the contrary, if he had them he would not be Mencken.

51

Why do the Salt of the Earth always look on critical minds like Mencken as "Bad Boys," "l'Enfant Terrible" and all that sort of thing? Is it because there is always something of the juvenile, the child, the pouter about the outsider, the maverick, the individualist? Mencken is looked on as some one who "never grew up."

52

If Mencken had lived in ancient Greece, it is very likely that he would have had little to do with Æschylus or Sophocles. Aristotle would have been his dish and Plato he would have denounced as rumble-dumble or pish-posh. The only plays he could have been

dragged into by the current Nathan would have been those of Aristophanes. Epicurus would have been his drink-crony. What would have been his attitude toward Shakespeare? "A rhetorician, with some corking good character creations," I imagine. Bacon would have been his Big Fellow. I dare not venture to think how he would have received Keats and Shelley had he lived in their time.

53

He remains totally silent on Latin culture. Is it ignorance or contempt? The Mediterranean is evidently as far away from Mencken's consciousness as a barroom brawl was from Nietzsche.

54

He is a glutton for learning, for culture. He swallows encyclopædias. But his waste apparatus is perfect. If it had not been, we might have had another John Dewey.

55

Is he, strictly speaking, an intellectual? No. The perfect intellectual must

possess all psychic faculties: imagination, intuition, logic, apperception and mystical awareness. He must be transcendental and practical. The great intellectual is the universal man (Leonardo, Shakespeare, Gœthe, Emerson).

Mencken's defects (and I must repeat again and again that his "defects" are the very sources of his power) preclude him from ever being called, strictly speaking, an Intellectual. (He himself would, doubtless, spurn the term as pedantic.) His scholarship, his learning, his intelligence are unquestioned and Gargantuan (literally); but he is, after all, a vast thinking apparatus superposed on a social rebel. Intellect is really a spiritual quality. It is transcendental. It is in his irony alone that Mencken most nearly approaches abstract Intellect.

56

The Hamlet and Timon in him are modified, humanized and in a measure deodorized by a Sancho Panza and a Tyl Eulenspiegel, especially by the latter. His profoundly serious self lives behind huge breastworks of practical joking, jest and kidding. He is a one hundred per cent Idealist entirely surrounded,

protected and safeguarded by an army of satiric rascals. But he is, at the very bottom, Don Quixote—yea, even a Parsifal making a perpetual sign of the cross before Klingsor and Kundry.

57

Mencken has the Nordic's incapacity for the epigram. He is a bench-worker, a journeyman. Short cuts to knowledge and wisdom are abhorrent to him. (When he had the *Smart Set* he used to order epigrams from me by the peck.)

His contempt for the epigram is well-founded, for everybody is now an epigrammatist, even women, children and Presidents. Proverbs are of the peasant. Still, the great epigrammatist is as rare as the great poet or composer. In those who possess the gift to a high degree there is always the temptation to be "smart." There is only one La Rochefoucauld, one Nietzsche and one Heine (the two latter, it will be recalled, worshipped at the shrine of French—epigrammatic—culture).

And yet Mencken lives at the very godhead of the epigram—paradox. He takes it forth from its mental caul, imperturb-

ably, unhurriedly; carries it to his work-bench, flattens it, pounds it, dips it, puts it under the microscope and X-rays and de-Gallicizes it. Finally, it appears as a long paragraph, sanded, scraped and gayly decorated with commas, semicolons and dashes. What was born a small silver arrow has become a solid bludgeon.

58

He sometimes has a perfect mania for compelling us to see he is right. He shovels proofs and dates and documents under my nose. When I hate a thing, that thing stinks, and when a thing stinks it should be removed, and there's an end on't. When a thing stinks in all decent nostrils to hell with facts!

59

I do not know whether he writes spontaneously or laboriously; but I do know that each word fits into his sentences like a brick in a wall and that each sentence gives evidence of having been weighed to a hair.

60

Mencken was once a great admirer of Kipling (see his "Ventures in Verse").

His prose still retains the Englishman's barbaric beat.

61

Nietzsche has evidently been an overwhelming influence in the thought-crystallization and style of Mencken. But if Nietzsche had never lived, I believe Mencken would not have been less Mencken but more Mencken.

62

He berates the peasant mind because it knows nothing of histology, protozoology, philology, paleontology, chemistry or biology ("Notes on Democracy"). A chemist, a biologist, a paleontologist, etc., may have the mind of a peasant, a moron—many of them have. They are not *because* of their scientific specialization either intelligent or civilized in the definition of those two words that are accepted by either Mencken or myself.

63

A perfect and, for me at least, a most delicate bit of Menckenian humor—the incongruity of widely dissociated ideas brought

suddenly together like the clash of cymbals—"a Kansan consuming *Clos Vougeot.*"

64

"Christ's simple and magnificent reduction of the duties of a man to the duties of a gentleman" ("Notes on Democracy"). This is a fine if somewhat extravagant vision of Jesus, and one that I had not thought of before: Jesus as a gentleman. Indeed, he was the perfect gentleman (rather, gentle-man). His protection of the woman taken in adultery, his protection of the woman who poured the ointment on his head, his love of little children, the healing of the ear of the servant of the High Priest, and his "Forgive them, for they know not what they do," are only a few of the evidences that recall to me that Jesus was the first gentleman that the Jews produced—if we except the compassionate Jew who spared Noah.

65

He teaches the exuberant joy of making enemies. His "Schimpflexion" is his *mot de Cambronne.*

66

There beats out of his pages a light reflected from icebergs. One must be a mental Eskimo to stand a steady diet of this Hyperboreal Mencken.

67

"The cosmogonies that educated men toy with are all inordinately complex. To comprehend their veriest outlines requires an immense stock of exact knowledge and a special habit of thought" ("Notes on Democracy"). There is something in Mencken that loves scientific and scholastic abracadabra. He has the theologian's love and belief in that which is arrived at by rigmarole. The poet, the mystic, those dowered with intuitional gifts and imaginative penetration, do not require all this flummery of learning to discover or arrive at anything.

The greatest cosmogony—that of the Hindus—is childishly simple; it required a *special sensibility*, not a special "habit of thought." The simple doctrine of relativity, first elucidated by Heraclitus (a mystical poet),

has been turned into an incomprehensible complexity by a modern mathematical obscurantist named Albert Einstein.

Mencken's habit of mind compels him to believe that the more complex a thing is the nearer it is to being true. This is all the more extraordinary and paradoxical when it is recalled that his own vision is ether-clear.

68

He says that "where the accepted authorities try to explain this or that phenomenon in terms of the unknown and unknowable I have always tried to account for it in terms of the known" ("Treatise on the Gods"). This is a complete summary of the attitude and method of the rationalistic mind. It is also an exact weighing of the worth of Mencken's book. I find nothing in it (the book) with which I can disagree—if and only so long as I accept his implied premise: that phenomena should be accounted for in terms of the known.

But all phenomena are unknowable. All that we do know, or can know approximately, is the content of our consciousness. Like Hume and Shestov, I doubt the very law of

causation. I deny all the "facts" of science and the rationalistic method—because there is only a ghost—man—and an irrational phantasmorama. Whatever is is unknowable.

Mencken does not know it—but he, too, in his hard-boiled rationalism is as full of "superstitions" as Cagliostro, Paracelsus, Swedenborg, Darwin, Einstein or Jacques Loeb. His book is, therefore, an attempt to adduce the knowable from an Unknowable, rationality from the Irrational, to moonshine facts out of a Fiction.

69

Before the Infinite and the Unknown, one superstition is as good as another. Mencken has his, which he variously calls reason, cause and effect, rationalism or experience.

70

If he had only a thread of the Jew in him!—just a *soupçon!*—not too much, for your real Jew is generally a coward even when he's on top.

71

He stimulates by teasing, by ragging you. If he inspires, it is to abuse—sometimes to an abuse of Mencken. No living man has cracked open the sewers of indignation as deftly as Mencken—from Nanette Chestnutt to the Rev. Dr. Melamed.

72

"I am quite devoid of the religious impulse" ("Treatise on the Gods"). His "amiable scepticism" proves he is not, for the metaphysic of scepticism is, "I am looking for something I need, but I have not yet found it."

73

I know of no nobler, saner, franker, more enlightened and more beautiful piece of simple *Apologia* than Mencken's preface to "Treatise on the Gods," although he seems to fall into the error of confounding religion and theology. One is an instinct (the dog and ant have it as well as Shakespeare and Nietzsche) and the other is a product of logic.

74

Speaking of religion, he says, "Its single function is to give man access to the powers which seem to control his destiny, and its single purpose is to induce those powers to be friendly to him" ("Treatise on the Gods"). This is precisely what science is also trying to do. Fundamentally, then, Science and Religion are one: the liberation of man from the powers inimical to him.

75

Religion deals with supernatural entities. Science deals with natural forces. But how does Mencken know that these supernatural entities and natural forces are not one and the same? He would answer that the probabilities, etc. But I say that these vast natural forces are entities. Where I agree with Mencken is that they pay no attention to our prayers and hosannahs.

76

For Mencken, as with Théophile Gautier, there is literally no insides to the uni-

verse. As a matter of fact, there is nothing but insides; there is no outside. An outside to anything would imply the existence of the finite. What makes the "Treatise on the Gods" an unsatisfactory work is that Mencken has no metaphysic. At least, I could never discover any. Now, a metaphysic, or an inside to thought, is as necessary as a hypothesis is to daily living, which is carried on by an act of organic faith. It will not do to utter the word Unknowable and then walk away from it. It must become your breath, your life, your great Fact.

I fear that Mencken runs away from the words God, Soul and Spiritual like the Methodists used to scurry to God's beard when they heard the name of Tom Paine or as the teeth fall out of the jaws of a New York Police Commissioner when he hears the word Bolshevist.

77

Mencken's confusion between theology and religion clears up when he comes to speak of mysticism, or direct relation of the human soul with its Ultimate. His hat is off here, so to speak, as it is before all forms of in-

dividual recalcitrancy. In fact, it is the gesture, and not the magic of the mystical consciousness, that pleases him.

78

I doubt whether any other English writer since Shakespeare has yanked up by the roots out of the raw, rank, obscene earth so many similes and metaphors and adjectives. Mencken is an event in the English language.

79

It was the religious instinct that invented the first priest, not, as Mencken says, the first priest who invented the first religion. He, of course, means the first priest invented the first forms of theology.

80

He conceives religion as an "invention." Here again is the confusion in his mind of *creation* and *manufacture* which I pointed out in his assertion that science would soon "create life." Theology was an invention, but religion is *à priori,* like hunger, sex and the instinct to steal.

81

One of the funniest things in Nietzsche was his "There's an old artilleryman in me!" (no doubt fiercely twirling his military mustache and slaying in his mind's eye the whole brood of Christian rascals). Mencken is saved from starting a war solely by his sense of humor. But there is an old artilleryman behind those china-blue eyes, too.

82

Man is an epical avatar. I will say yes—have said it a thousand times in print —to everything that can be said that belittles and bemerdes the human race; and yet I say Man is a sublime, an epical, and awe-thrilling sight. He is a cross between a cunning bootlicker and a spittle-shirted half-wit—all right; I agree. And yet just because of this he is a Titan, for it is the odds against him and not what he is that makes of him a sublime figure. And yet there is from time to time in Mencken's pages something almost like a sob of pity (if you have an ear for subtle overtones), which is the basis of the epical concept which he seems to lack.

83

Mencken is too sane to be immortal. One has but to read his essay on "The Poet and His Art" to see this.

84

Because prose comes later in the history of the race than poetry, he assumes that it is something greater, better. Because it is laboriously arrived at—whereas poetry often comes spontaneously and inspirationally—he takes it for granted that it is something superior (here again is the Teuton belief that hard work is a sort of redemption of soul and body).

As a matter of fact, all prose is a kind of decayed poetry. That prose is greatest which retains most its musical qualities, its poetic core (Nietzsche, Victor Hugo, Cabell, for instance). He names ("The Poet and His Art") Anatole France, Addison, Macaulay, George Moore, Cabell, George Russell, Dunsany and Nietzsche as great *prosateurs*. Six of these were poets—neither Addison nor Macaulay was either a poet or a great *prosateur;* they were high-school essayists, stilted, pedantic.

85

He speaks of "a graying man who still played the Chopin waltzes" as "unnatural and a trifle obscene." Aside from his dislike of Chopin (in whom he mistakenly sees only a composer of love-sick music, whereas Chopin is as profound as Buddha or Schopenhauer), this is forced. Besides, to me, such a sight would be infinitely pathetic and beautiful.

86

I draw great pleasure from his "sweet gaudiness," "the primordial tadpole of a sonnet," "clang-tint" and "the mere bubble of the words." He is no poet; but he is often poetical.

87

Mencken has everywhere an implied, if not an explicit, contempt for those who use any dodge to escape reality. There is something tremendously courageous, almost sadistically so, in this attitude. It is probable, with him, that reality itself is an escape from something he fears more—sentiment, romance, mys-

ticism. Mencken's day-and-night hell is the fear that he will grow soft.

88

Here is a jewel: "To soothe the wrinkled and fevered brow with beautiful balderdash."

89

He denounces the Poet as a liar. That is precisely what lifts the Poet (the great poet) above humanity. Any damn fool can bawl out the truth; but to create beautiful and immortal lies, that alone is the tagmark of the rare spirit, and that it is which lifts Shelley and Beethoven above the ruck of mere truth-trawlers. They distil luring lies like a bee drips honey.

90

"The *mystical stuff* of Crawshaw, Thompson, Yeats and company" ("The Poet and His Art"). Before such opaqueness as this I must remain mute, for I myself voted three times for Bryan. Who amongst us is not touched at times by the dark wing of idiocy? Let him

who hath not in God's mercy the taint cast the first stone at Mencken! But wait!—God a' mercy! Perpend: "Then we turn to Swinburne and 'The Garden of Proserpine'—more false assurances, more mellifluous play-acting, another tinkling make-believe—but how sweet on blue days!" Now, "The Garden of Proserpine" is one of the most profoundly pessimistic poems ever written, a hymn to nihility, the last words of which are the keynote of the poem, "eternal night." Has Mencken confused this sublime poem with the song of our boyhood—"Over the Garden Wall"?

91

I discover a miracle in Mencken's work: good-natured anger, burbling venom, chortling frenzy.

92

He explains his growing aversion to poetry on the ground that its "asseverations" are "obviously not true." This is, to me, "obviously not true." His æsthetic sense seems to be disappearing. To me, this would be a form

of death. To Mencken, it spells progress. Will the time ever come when he can no longer find an ecstasy in Bach, Brahms and Schubert?

Beware of affronting Pure Beauty! Mencken should pray.

93

Mencken goes at Browning savagely over and over for asserting that the world is perfect. (As a matter of fact, Browning never said any such thing—he put the celebrated "All's well," &c, in the mouth of Pippa, one of his characters.) He makes him the Bottom of all Poetry.

Aside from Browning's philosophy (in which I am not interested, as he was a poet), he was a man who possessed a sense of vital dramatic values second to none, and he did gorgeous things with the English language. But Mencken's fierce hunt for God (which he calls "getting at the truth") prevents him from separating a man's style from his "message."

94

He speaks of Charles Darwin as the "highest type of man" because he regarded

"poetry as silly." Aside from the fact that Darwin bemoaned in his latter years the fact that his æsthetic sense had atrophied (beware of offending Eros and Helena!), which fact Mencken does not mention, I for one deny that Darwin—although a superb figure—is the highest type of man. I should say that he is, compared to a Shakespeare, an Æschylus, a Napoleon, a Beethoven, a Baudelaire, a Buddha, a Shelley, a Rembrandt, a beaver compared to an eagle, Sancho Panza's mule compared to Pegasus. (All "progress," to me, is æsthetic and irrational.)

His work was not very important, for it makes as little difference whether we have ascended from lowet forms or descended from higher forms as it does as to whether the earth goes around the sun or the sun goes around the earth. The important questions are, Why are we here at all, where are we going, and why should anything go around anything else? And there is one person alone who makes an approximate answer to these questions: the Artist. "The Garden of Proserpine" has the touch of eternity about it. "The Origin of Species" will soon be as dead as Keely's motor.

The "highest type of man" is,

then, the Poet, who looks on Science as a branch of his own Romantic Nihilism.

95

Mencken is on solid ground when he says both Lincoln's Gettysburg address and the Declaration of Independence are rhetorical bunk. They are neither prose nor poetry. They are Rotary English.

96

What is truth? That is what this whole matter of the poetic liar resolves itself into. Truth, according to Mencken, is a phenomenal fact. I say truth is experience. An image is as true as any other fact. Shelley's "Witch of Atlas" is a truth.

97

After all, he tells us, he is not a poetry-hater. But, he says, it still remains there is far more good prose in the world, and there always has been, than good poetry. That is so because it is easier to write. Almost all the great poets write equally good prose (and by prose I do not mean logic or prosiness).

Of course, there is always the moot case of Swinburne. Mencken dusts his jacket. Swinburne, to me, is a great prose-writer (I have no set standards of any kind). Swinburne enchants me and stimulates me always. Therefore, to me, he is a great prose writer. But I cannot see how Mencken can condemn the natural, if sometimes clumsy, style of Swinburne and go wild over the stilted artificialities of Conrad.

98

He will not allow Hamlet any more brains than a "Fifth avenue rector," damns Shakespeare as a playwright and a thinker and says he survives merely because of the music of his English. If this is so, then, how comes it that Shakespeare is revered in every non-English-speaking or reading country in the world (especially in Germany), where the music of the original is quite lost?

As a matter of fact, Shakespeare is the greatest thinker the race has yet produced. It is only peasants like Bernard Shaw and Tolstoy who belch their garlic around his name because they have their own economic axes to grind. But Mencken has more courage than

these socialistic zanies (they hate Shakespeare because of his aristocratic contempt for the people—groundlings and stinking-feet), and so he rams Shakespeare in the pigeonhole with Beethoven and makes a pure musician out of him.

Mencken's wrestling with the poets is second only in spectacular fascination to Jacob's wrestling match with the Angel.

99

He says "prose must convince." Here again is the notion that a beautiful thing *must* have a mission beyond precisely what it is in itself. Poetry must "charm" and prose must "convince." Why? Poetry may terrify (Baudelaire) or prose may be beautiful and still sometimes unconvincing (Mencken, Victor Hugo, myself).

100

What I particularly revere about Mencken is the way he selects and twists facts to suit his sensibility, theories and innate prejudices. He is quite a poet in this respect. I myself once wrote somewhere, "O Poets, to hell with facts! Your mission is either to ignore them or

manufacture them, for you are gods!" I salute my brother Transcendentalist!

101

Mencken says he "never heard of a truly first-rate man who got any permanent satisfaction out of its content [poetry]". Shakespeare, Shelley, Keats, Gœthe, Whitman, Æschylus, Poe, Swinburne and Baudelaire were not first-class men? *Gesundheit!*

102

"Poetry is chiefly produced and esteemed by peoples who have not yet come to maturity." On the contrary, a country that no longer produces or esteems great poets is decaying. Maturity is another form of being rotten-ripe, like the present Western civilization, which has no master poet.

103

If you want to read Mencken at his very worst, at low-ebb, on the very last layer of the superficial and at the very nub of mental darkness read his "Edgar Saltus" ("Prejudices: Fifth Series"). He, first of all, believes all the

slop printed in Mrs. Saltus' venomous biography of one of the rarest spirits and of one of the greatest prose-masters that Anglo-American literature has produced. Here are some phrases: "The stale ribaldries of Arthur Schopenhauer," "lack of solid substance" (everything must be "solid" and tangible in Mencken's universe of Dreisers, Suckows, Cathers and the rest of the American writing Yahooery); "he lacked dignity, information, sense" (Mencken knows nothing of the gifts of instantaneous psychic penetration and imaginative intuition that nihilists, mystics and geniuses are born with. To hell with dignity, information and sense!—they are the virtues of hack writers); " 'The Truth About Tristrem Varick' reads like one of the shockers of Gertrude Atherton." This Varick is one of the greatest philosophical and most drastically ironic stories ever written—dead in America, of course!, where a war-whine and a privy stench like "All Quiet on the Western Front" sells like syringes and toilet paper.

But I enjoyed the essay because of its sheer brutality and the sardonic snickers I got out of it. He has two gorgeously venomous

sentences in it which make me glad it was written.

104

Dr. Isaac Goldberg has pointed out in his racy book on Mencken the enormous influence of the family, of ancestry, of the hearth on Mencken. Indeed, in my reading to date of Mencken's works I have not found anywhere that he attacks the home, the parent-superstition, the mother-fetich.

The home is the greatest foe the soul of the individualist has; it is the breeder, the nest-egg, the sty of almost all our ills. It is a mutilating-machine, a torture-chamber. There all that is petty, venomous and inhibited is bred. The home is the lair of all hypocrisies. It is a mental custard-mould.

My theory is that great enlightenment and civilization are not possible until the concept Home (in the manger sense) is rooted out of the brain and parents are regarded as necessary evils. When Mencken grows tired of his onslaughts on the boobery, let him turn, for rejuvenation (for both Mencken and myself keep youthful and blooming on our hates) to

demolishing the first and last Moloch—the Home.

105

Mencken is profoundly American in his belief that a thing that is not useful has little value. It is the superfluous by-products of the mind and the will that give to life its real values. I prefer the bum to the honest workingman. The reverse is, I believe, true of Mencken.

106

Mencken the man is more solidly human than almost any one you know. Humanism—even sentimentalism—is nearer the heart of a cynic than it is to the heart of a romantic enthusiast. Recall Sebastian Van Storck and Bazaroff? Both implacable, cold nihilists, they both sacrificed their lives trying to save the life of a peasant baby in a flood. Mencken's like that, somewhat.

107

I do not question the validity of logic, but I do question the validity of all premises for ultimate value and "truths." Mencken

and I are one here. But by some strange syllogistic twist, while he admits the relativity of all premises, he exhibits a kind of absolutism in his logical processes.

108

"Today he [Edgar Saltus] survives only as the favorite author of the late Warren Gamaliel Harding." This is a good sample of unfair criticism. Suppose I said, "The fact that Mencken has boosted that illiterate sobsister of literature, Theodore Dreiser, will give the public a good look into the quality of the Menckenian gray matter"? It would be damn poor reasoning.

109

"Knowledge is not only power; it is also courage" ("Treatise on the Gods"). Consider this thoughtfully: As knowledge increases the will tends to divide and weaken. The more we know the more introspective we become. Knowledge is a great ill, like the imagination—a sublime ill, an Hamletic ill.

Courage has simply nothing to do with knowledge. Courage is, rather, the

product of ignorance, blindness, faith. Only a perfect faith like Lindbergh's could have had the gods with him so beautifully.

The dynamic power of ignorance and stupidity is before our eyes every day. Ignorance, faith, stupidity make martyrs. Knowledge is a paralyzer of courage. Swiftness, cunning and prehensility achieve power in this world. Knowledge is Hamlet. Courage is Mahomet.

110

I have always accepted (in fact, had years ago worked it out on my own hook) the doctrine of Gœthe, Croce, Carlyle and Mencken that a work of art should be judged by this formula: What did he try to say? Did he say it—and how well? The "Treatise on the Gods" is, judged thus, a perfect book. Mencken has in it expressed perfectly the intent in the title. That there are no insides to this book is beside the mark as fair criticism.

111

He pooh-poohs "consolations" (theology, poetry, &c.). Would he abolish an-

æsthetics, drink and music? Will "progress" (that Messianic word of Mencken's) have come when they are abolished?

There is a moralic Utopist in him—this perpetual babble about the true, about progress! The planet, with everybody on board, is bound for the hell of the Sun, which, in turn, will finally become a moon. Mencken grabs at certain terms like "civilized man," "Progress," "truth" as though they were realities, as though man were preordained to move in some definite direction. Is it possible that *he,* too, cannot face *the* Truth—universal extinction?

Darwin's whole theory of the *ascent* of man is theological; so is Mencken's. When Mencken's "consolations" are no more there will be universal suicide—well, speed the day, I say! Meantime, give me this day my daily lie—God, poetry, music, drink, women, nature.

112

He has the illusion that with the disappearance of the religious instinct (an inconceivable thing, by the way, for it is bound

up with sex and the instinct of self-preservation) fear will disappear. Well, there is less religion in the world today than at any other time in historical memory—and there never was less individual courage!

113

Certainly Mencken's hypothesis of what the Flood really was ("Treatise on the Gods") and just who Noah was is not as poetic as Jehovah's own account of that matter; but it is, in a sense, much funnier than Roark Bradford's. It really belongs with Rip's "Believe It or Not" anthology of grotesques.

114

"To primitive man all things were natural" ("Treatise on the Gods"). The natural, as a matter of fact, is a concept arrived at only lately and has not yet been accepted by the majority of men. In fact, very few of us are bold enough to believe in a wholly natural universe to the extent of including in it all so-called supernatural or super-normal happenings. The primitive man lived in a world of the unexpected, the unknown, the inexplicable. How,

then, could he think, believe or feel anything to be natural (which presupposes a knowledge of law, of abstract causation?).

115

"If theology ever goes to the boneyard, then poetry will probably go with it. The two are very much alike" ("Treatise on the Gods"). And so will music. But this is perfect tosh and pish-posh, with a touch of hooey. The relation, or resemblance, between Keats' "The Eve of St. Agnes" and the 39 Articles is hardly discernible to a going brain.

116

It is probably because I have been so often unfair and blackguardly myself that I revel in Mencken even when he drives me to apoplectic conniptions. But why fight fair and how deal with a nation—with a world—of blackguards otherwise than as a blackguard?

117

If you want to take the bad taste of the Edgar Saltus slop-daisy essay out of your mouth turn to "Beethoven" in the same vol-

ume. Here is Mencken at his noblest (a word he satirically loves), at his highest flame of enthusiasm. He is almost Hugoesque, Hunekerish here—yes, almost Saltus-like in his dithyrambic chant to the greatness of Beethoven! What have we here?—"a god," "Olympian," "hell-fire," "once more the gods walked," "determination to challenge and beat the gods"!

Blessed moment to find Henry flinging away his logic, his "truths," his picking of fly-specks out of black pepper and ranting with ecstatic enthusiasm! In seven short pages he has packed an immense amount of feeling and thought about a man whose genius was the unsevered silver cord between Mother God and Mother Earth!

118

When Mencken said the Jews were the most unpleasant race in the world—which brought all the ghetto-brained Jews down on him, caused a thousand rabbis to spittle-babble with rage in their beards and caused the quasi-learned Doctor Melamed such racial fantods that he called Spinoza an atheist—when Mencken said this he uttered only a

half-truth. The whole truth is that the Jews are not only the unpleasantest race in the world but the most cowardly and unfair also.

119

He says that the poet runs away from reality. No one knows what reality is but the poet. No one suffers more from it. No one understands it better. Must I repeat the tale of the martyrdoms of Poe, Verlaine, Thompson, Heine and a thousand others? The scientist, the materialist faces it with such look-what-I-can-stand! airs because he has, generally, the tough hide of a longshoreman and the emotional and spiritual integument of a Bishop Jim Cannon.

Mencken knows nothing of the reality of the poet, although he'd get an inkling of it in the lives of his beloved Beethoven and Schubert, who ran like hell from the Beast into the arms of the Mother of Unreality, Music. The Medusæ are the mothers of poets.

120

Since the Diaspora the Jewish soul has been storing up venom like muzzled

adders and cobras. Mencken came within striking distance and felt the fang.

121

Nothing is easier, once you are set that way, than to smash popular idols. But the greatest sport, and the rarest, is to smash the idols of the intellectuals, the rationalists, the scientific-minded, the liberals. That sweet joy is alone given to ironic nihilists, mystical eternists, sky-bombing Tyl Eulenspiegels.

122

It may be because the Jews are "the most unpleasant race ever heard of" that they are so strong, uncrushable, fascinating, useful. I have noted in my somewhat thoughtful life that those things that are unpleasant have about them the aura of immortality.

123

There are few social and intellectual rebels, from Prometheus to Mencken and myself, who do not stem from venom and resentment. It is sometimes inexplainable, and is part-proof of an anterior existence.

124

He praises a salmon because it is "a sound and efficient machine." God-damn such Americanisms, Teutonisms, Rotary rot! Man is worth-while just in so far as he is not a "sound and efficient machine." It is really our glaring deficiencies as a fighting machine, as a physical machine, as a mental machine and what we have accomplished with our enormous handicaps that constitute our worth, our special grandeur.

125

Why does Mencken reverence (almost) a man who can "create life"? Is it hatred of God or love of man, or what we kids used to call "out-dorseying" one another? Personally, I should salute the man who could annihilate life, a much harder job, I think, than manufacturing it (even "manufacturing life" is a contradiction in terms and concepts).

Why this childish delight in manufacturing, or "creating," what is superfluous, useless and has no meaning?

126

There is something sublime in the purely scientific spirit—the attempt to get rid of the personal equation in the name of Curiosity, Truth or the Absolute; for the sublime is that which takes no thought of self. The perfect scientist works, as far and as best as he can, beyond need, desire, bias. But Mencken for all his flights toward this heaven has it *not,* for in all matters—and, above all, in the most abstract—he accentuates the personal equation instead of deflecting it. He is thus not a truth-seeker but a more-Mencken seeker—and this is why he stands out beyond and above the rest of his countrymen.

127

In "The Anthropomorphic Delusion" we come upon Mencken at his bitterest and worst. (I am a radiant pessimist. Mencken is a toxic pessimist.) He lugs out the whole zoo, and, like Adam a-squat on a tree-trunk in Main Street, Eden, he enumerates the epical qualities of the bee, the ant, the lion, the yellow dog, the antelope, the gorilla (who is "kinder to his

children and more faithful to his wife"), and so and so—all to the detriment of man. He believes the ants and bees (both Fordized, Mussolinized and Stalinized to a condition of pure automatic imbecility), for instance, to be more ingenious and intelligent than man. As I cannot detect irony in this cliché, I must pass it over in silence as the maniacal cosmic rage of a most estimable and reasonable being.

This zoological epic of the animal and insect kingdoms is an apotheosis of all the Babbittarian virtues. I deny emphatically that any animal that walks has more courage than man. An entity without imagination has no courage at all whether it is called a lion or a Lindbergh. Man is the most majestic, intelligent, courageous, be-devilled, stoical and idiotic animal in the cosmos.

Courage!—why, just to go on living must cause the gods to stand struck and paralyzed with admiration!

128

"No other animal is so defectively adapted to its environment [as man]."

This is precisely what produces Beethovens, Shelleys and Menckens.

129

It used to be the philosopher's stone, the transmutation of all metals into gold, the number of angels that could be got on the end of a pin, extracting light from cucumbers. Now it's creating life from matter and force, finding the absolute of all phenomena, etc.

Same old abracadabra!

Mencken would spit upon the very names of Paracelsus, Katerfelto, Cagliostro, and so and so. He never suspects that the Loebs are the reincarnations of these fellows, and not half as fascinating and enchanting in their fantastic fiddle-faddle. Piltdown skulls and Pekin men have taken the place of the bones of Saint Anne and the holy coalscuttle of Jesus.

130

While the work of Mencken simply pullulates with thought, there is no gloze of meditation over his pages, no patina

of prolonged silences, no muffled music from the gulfs of introspection.

131

"The anthropomorphic theory of the world is made absurd by modern biology," he says ("The Life of Man"). Everything is anthropomorphic. Whatever is (except Essence) is created by man in the image of man. All form is man-created. Biology is anthropomorphic. The laws of life are spun out of our own brains. The God of biology is Necessity—a man-made concept.

132

In "The Life of Man" we are all reduced to an eczema, a local disease of the cosmos, and worse. Maybe our value consists in discovering our worthlessness (which no one, not even Mencken, ultimately believes).

No entity that has risen to the heights wherein it can judge itself and God and commit suicide can be dismissed as a local cosmic disease. The rest of the universe may be so dismissed, but not man.

133

When the poet in a man expires he becomes a prose-writer; when the prose-writer expires he writes for the *Atlantic Monthly*. This, Henry, is the real order of æsthetic devolution—*quoi?*

134

Huneker and Mencken did more than any other two men of the century to thin the ranks of the literary stud-horses from Vassar and the fillies from Harvard.

135

Mencken's mind is luminous, but not alchemic. He is a Realist who is always fighting tooth and nail the Romantic in him. But it is as a Romantic that he will finally be hung in the Louvre of Rebels: he is always David about to launch a mighty coprolite at some Goliath.

136

His definition of the Romantic is the man who exaggerates everything. Menck-

en is, then, a Romantic, for he exaggerates everything, picks out the weakest side of his opponent and plays on it till it becomes the whole man. In this sense Mencken is an artist—a great caricaturist—for all art is exaggeration, prejudice.

137

What fascinates me most in Mencken is that barbarous, unhuman note. I take a man's measure by his love of the unhuman, the impersonal. (Non-human would, I suppose, be a better term): the sea, Nietzsche, mountains, Machiavelli, mathematics, Wagner, the stars, Strindberg, Space, the symbol of Satan, Spinoza, the God Necessity, Baudelaire, Darwin.

I love Mencken most when he rises to murderous flayings, when he is frantic, when he squirts vitriol in the face of Smugmug, Mamamouchi and Roger Bontemps.

138

"Faith may be defined briefly as an illogical belief in the occurrence of the improbable" ("The Believer"). If this is so, then

it is faith that is at the bottom of all enlightenment and civilization, for all progressive revolutions and discoveries are first dreamed of and announced by men who have faith in what at first seems illogical even to them, and their triumph always seems improbable.

Faith is metaphysical, and nothing can be accomplished without faith, belief. Nothing can be created or destroyed that does not imply faith. Science works absolutely on a terrain of faith and improbables.

He says, further, that faith is a "wish-neurose." Precisely. Wish-neurose is the foundation of all life, all movement. Faith is the eternal illusion, whether in a scientist or a Methodist.

"Faith" is not theological. It is biological. It is a condition of survival.

139

Man is only a sick fly on the wheel of the Cosmos, according to Mencken. I think, rather, we are a kind of tetter, or grocer's itch, on the backside of the Great Abra. This explains why Abra cannot sit down and rest for a moment, why he must keep going on

—there are so many Lucifers, Menckens and DeCassereses that give Abra a pain in the cadabra.

140

He is rather narrow in his conception of the "real," of "facts," of the "true." Whatever exists is real, is a fact, is true. Poetry, imagination, fantasy, meditation, music, romance, etc., etc., are as real, as factual, as true as Babe Ruth's bat. Nothing is more "real" (and also as insubstantial and as intangible) as my thought, my consciousness, my instincts, my identity. My crazy dreams are "facts." They certainly make a more lasting impression on me than the solid, all-too-solid external universe.

141

Any one who has dealt with Mencken in his capacity as editor of the *American Mercury* knows that he has not only introduced a new kind of magazine to America but he has also introduced a new kind of editor: a gentleman—that is, one who gives immediate attention to your manuscripts, pays

spot cash, encloses return stamped envelope with the proofs and gives you second serial rights without asking. The *Mercury* has been copied far and wide. The enlightened proceedings of its editor will not, generally, be copied, I fear. Such consideration is obviously part of the Red Menace.

142

Dr. Melamed (the same eminent scholar who said Spinoza was an atheist!) says Mencken contradicts himself. My regret is that Mencken does not contradict himself more. Logic is his sin.

143

Mencken, it seems to me, wants man to be a reasonable, logical creature instead of the illogical, absurd, unreasonable creature that he is. If man were a reasonable, logical being, universal suicide would ensue, or at least race-suicide through non-bearing women. (Schopenhauer said that if reproduction were an act of the reason mankind would soon disappear.)

Aside from the delightful prospect of human annihilation, I could conceive of nothing stupider, less entertaining, less profitable than a reasonable, enlightened, logical, tolerant human race. And I know that Mencken would flee it, too, as he would flee a world governed by Spencers, Darwins and Loebs.

144

He sometimes approaches the abyss (to him) of enthusiasm, but always draws back in time. There is the case of Huneker, who was a daddy, in a way, to all of us. I think Mencken is several times on the point of busting (I am shameless in regard to my intellectual emotions—I shout and blubber my gratitude right from the fire-escape, and also drop things therefrom on the upturned faces of those I despise); but he rights himself just in time. Whoa!, Pegasus, Whoa!

145

He has great praise for Havelock Ellis' neutrality during the war. Which recalls how Romain Rolland also scrambled up an

Alpine (Swiss) peak during the war and wept for the human race, preserving his bacon and his royalties for serener days.

Now, I often wonder whether a man who remains neutral in a war is above the race or very much under it. My cat and dog were neutral. Then, again, isn't neutrality a thinly disguised veil for cowardice? No man can be neutral in anything. Neutrality in a war is not human; it is sentimental inhumanity. Conscientious objectors should be shot on sight, while a conscientious traitor (a far higher product than a pacifist) should be merely shut up for safekeeping.

I have my misgivings about Mencken's admiration for Ellis' neutrality. I cannot conceive Mencken being neutral about anything—certainly not a war. I consider myself an enlightened, civilized man, but during the war I was for France conquering the whole of the Continent and after the war making of England and America subject nations.

I may be a traitor some day; but blow me to a billion electrons if I am ever that eunuch—a conscientious objector, a pacifist or a neutral!

146

Sometimes he uses ugly words like œdematus. What it means I do not know nor do I care. It is ugly looking, ugly sounding and emits an odor. Mencken has too much truck with Johns Hopkins. These words suddenly spoil some of his most beautiful sentences.

147

How, why and when to get rid of a friend: this is one of Mencken's finest and most unusual paragraphs. It is the most condensed essay on friendship (rarer than a phagocyte in a Methodist's bowels) extant. Nothing illustrates better the independence and isolation-at-any-price of Mencken. It is something I have practised for years. When I hear of "a life-long friendship" I wonder which is the parasite and which is the udder.

148

"If we assume that man actually does resemble God, then we are forced into the impossible theory that God is a coward, an

idiot and a bounder." This is giving Lord Abra a bad break. For this resemblance would also mean that God is something of a Brahms, a Shakespeare, an Emerson and a Cervantes.

149

Mencken's terrific and ultra-Swiftian onslaught on the human soul ("The Anthropomorphic Delusion") is the one great proof (among a thousand others) of the soul's innate nobility. No man could spew such rare venom unless he came "trailing clouds of glory."

150

"Verlaine and Villiers de l'Isle Adam and other such *fantastic fish*" ("Huneker: A Memory"). I weep—for of such tosh is the kingdom of Irving Babbitt and Henry Ford!

151

Of Frank Harris he says: "What he has to say always seems novel, ingenious and true" ("Five Men at Random").

Seems is the key-word in that sentence. There is nothing novel, ingenious and very little that is true in the whole range of Harris' work; but it *seems* to be so because of the trumpeting larynx of this janitor of the latrines of genius.

152

In "the national fear of ideas" ("The National Letters") Mencken has run his fingers deep into the most vacuous part of the American skull. We also have a profound fear of instinct. Thus it lives, this American soul, between the upper levels of ideas and the solid earth of instinct in a sort of mid-region of lawns and grottoes: a land of sentimental idealism and pop-eyed optimism.

153

Again Mencken drives the nail deep into the wooden skull of "literary" America when he says our literature lacks gusto. For a Puritanized American writer to show gusto would be comparable to a Harvard professor who writes books admitting that he enjoyed the sex-act. It simply isn't done in our set, Reggy!

154

I can hear the very beat of Mencken's blood in his style and the glee-gurgles he must utter when his brass-bound images rattle down the swivels from his brain to the paper.

155

"In so foul a nest of imprisoned and fermenting sex as the United States, plain fornication becomes a mark of relative decency" ("The National Letters"). This masterly sentence of virile, vivid English prose should be handed to every aspiring jackass in America who comes to us and asks us "how to learn to write."

156

Just as Mencken says Beethoven could not write a poor piece of music, so I say that Mencken cannot write a poor piece of prose; but for the content of some of his prose I shall ask the Lord God to scald him in Jonathan Edwards' hell for a thousand years.

157

You have not discovered the deep-sea Mencken unless you sense the profound note of pathos that wells up through his work in the spots, here and there, where his satire is, or seems, about to turn to a sob. He might then say with Ivan Karamazoff, "The earth is drenched with tears to the core."

158

He overpraises Poe the critic—"the critical writing of Poe, in which there lies most that was best in him"—to the detriment of Poe the poet and story-teller. Poe's criticism will not last; it is ephemeral and of value only to the curious. A great creator's critical value lies in his creative work, not in his dissection of it or of other men's. No critic—not even Sainte-Beuve, Symons, Hazlitt or Huneker—is of any great value as a critic unless he writes creative prose or something else that is creative.

The greatest critics are Sophocles, Rabelais, Montaigne, Shakespeare, Hugo, Baudelaire, Dostoievsky, Whitman, etc., and the Poe of "Ulalume" and "The Fall of the

House of Usher," not Poe the boresome plagiarist-sleuth.

159

We see the closed side of Mencken again when he calls D'Annunzio and Maeterlinck "exotic mountebanks." Mencken is so hopelessly Nordic that everything that is not Nordic is contemptuously "exotic." He is so profoundly the realist, so completely and congenitally without a sense of the infinite or the eternal, so nearly philistine in his attitude toward the poetic, the precious, the subtle and the psychologically morbid, that Maeterlinck and D'Annunzio (two of the most acutely and subtly antennaed minds of the age) would necessarily be, in his view, "exotic mountebanks."

In the consciousness of the Yahweh-picked Anglo-Saxon an exotic person is a Latin, a Jew, a Chinaman and all other variations of the sodomist, the pure æsthete and the circumcised.

160

My God!, the years Mencken has spent—wasted—in mentally rolling in

tons and tons of dried dung: American fiction! Can he ever be cleansed? Such is the price an honest workman must pay for thoroughness. (Dante's River of Dung—was that a vision of American fiction to come?)

161

His fear of rhetoric and ecstasy in writing is almost a neurose. Nevertheless, his is a boreal rhetoric, a hissing, headlong ecstasy, the passion that coils in verbs and nouns and suddenly leaps forth in an orgasm of adjectives and epithets.

162

Like so many writers, he unmercifully pounds the American "plutocracy" in bemoaning the absence of an "aristocracy" that he believes, by some abracadabra, will pour out genius and culture.

I do not scare a bit at the word plutocracy (which is all that an aristocracy is), which is used now like they used to use "atheist" and "free love" to blench pre-McKinley souls.

We are a plutocracy! All right —what of it? Every country in the world, in whatever age, whether called absolute or limited monarchy, republic, a communistic, socialistic or Fascist State, is, in essence and in fact, a plutocracy. Whatever is is mazuma. Everything is founded on money. All else is mask.

And I, for one, believe that culture, brains and individuality have a better chance under a plutocracy than under an aristocracy. There is Mencken himself to prove it.

163

The plutocratic fear of the Reds, which Mencken so finely but unconvincingly satirizes, is well founded. There is nothing more important than money—property—in the world. Every Red knows that; all Russians know that. In order to lick the world all Russia needs is money.

The plutocrats are all thieves; the Reds are potentially or actually all thieves. There is no principle involved. To hell with ideals! I'm for protecting my bank account by

upholding the Reigning Dynasty of Forty Thieves so long as they protect me.

Our plutocracy does quite right in keeping both eyes on the meek and lowly rats out of the sewers of Moscow. Russia is not a "scare"—she's a direct menace!

164

He says that with Jefferson and Washington the promise of an American aristocracy died ("The National Letters"). Thank heaven, then, it passed with them! Especially with Washington, who turned his back on Thomas Paine when the latter came back to America because the Methodist McBrides and Bowlbys of that day ordered thumbs down on Tom. Jefferson never could have been the father of an aristocracy. Washington would have made a typical aristocratic forefather: cowardly, conventional, closed.

165

Mencken says New England's "celebrated adventures in mysticism . . . are now seen to have been little more than an elab-

orate hocus-pocus" ("The National Letters"). There is more genuine mysticism in Emerson and Thoreau (and I include Walt Whitman, Long Islander) than in any other three mystics that ever lived, including the pseudo, anthropomorphic mysticism of Jesus. These three healthy, sane Americans also came nearer, *without any hocus-pocus,* to a complete realization of the individual's union with Essence and Presence than any three men that ever lived if I might possibly except three other great, genuine, sane mystics, Spinoza, Gœthe, Shelley.

I am somewhat proud of being an American when I think of Emerson, Thoreau and Whitman. No amount of critical cackle can take these men off of their pedestals. They are our contribution to Pantheistic Mysticism *without* the hocus-pocus of Jesus or Swedenborg.

166

When Burke said you cannot indict a whole people he didn't know that at that precise moment a Mencken in Leipzig was carrying Henry around in his glands. "The

National Letters" ("Prejudices: Second Series") is not only an indictment of a whole people, it's a barbecue à la Torquemada.

Making due allowance for everything in it that causes my Latinity to belch curses, I think it the solidest and most completely murderous piece of criticism that has been penned since God put down in his diary, "Tomorrow I shall drown the whole human race with the exception of Noah."

167

One of the most extraordinary bits of naïve idealism ever indulged in by a hard-headed realist I find in the chapter "The Cultural Background" ("The National Letters"). It is a pæan to some form of aristocratic society which does not and has never existed on this earth. It is, it seems, an asylum for all free spirits, a refuge for "extraordinary men of the lower orders." "It is nothing," it seems, "if it is not autonomous, curious, venturesome, courageous."

Is this the aristocracy that came to the rescue of Socrates, Jesus, Bruno, Galileo,

Dostoievsky or that hailed and pensioned Spinoza, Schubert and Heine? As a matter of fact, aristocracies have never done anything but make pimps of genius. All aristocracies are organizations of bullies, cowards and blackguards. They made pants-kissers of even Gœthe and Voltaire.

168

An anatomy of Mencken's mind discloses to me over and over again that the minute he thinks he is going to fall into the pit of mystical or unbiological expression he pulls himself up into the domain of the realistic consciousness and substitutes for the lurking mystical Thaïs of his brain some humorous substitute, as when he speaks of the almighty power of romantic love as "the insistent promptings of the Divine Schadchen."

As a mystic who loathes the jargon of mysticism except when it expresses clearly and definitely a clear and definite emotion or state of consciousness in my own psyche, I say better a cycle of Mencken's humor than an hour of romantic pâtois.

169

If Mencken's "The Nature of Love" were put into the hands of every sensitive boy and girl of post-pubescent age on the planet, only illiterate peasants would beget. Strindberg nor Schopenhauer ever did a completer, a more beautifully brutal job. The only thing that can triumph over this state of things —the sex-stench—therein depicted is profound and hell-fronting Love, as rare on this planet as genius or a congenital sense of honor.

Love (or sentimental-romantic *amour)* is one thing; the sex-sties are another.

170

Mencken says he has a trunkful of clippings of the stupidities uttered by American professors during the war. Verbal stupidities during a war are not only quite understandable (in any country) but legitimate. When we hate let us hate well—and lie well. But it would be more to the point to collect the droolings and drivellings of our professors during these normal times of peace. For here we see the real *derrière*—the primordial, the pre-established, the immanent *Derrière*—

of the professor, who is (ninety per cent of them) in all ages, countries and times a pimp and poltroon, a parrot and a vacuous snob.

171

He believes Mark Twain to be "a much greater artist than either Poe or Whitman . . . but a good deal lower as a man." Aside from the fact that Mark Twain was not an artist at all (except in the one isolated instance of "The Mysterious Stranger"), this is a flat contradiction in terms. A great artist must necessarily always be a great man. It is *because* Twain was simply a cowardly Yahoo that he was not only not a great artist but, as I said, with the one exception (when he ceased, very furtively, to be either a coward or a Yahoo) not an artist at all.

Twain was a Yankee philistine satirist and plug-in-the-mouth, spit-in-the-stove yarn spinner and a superficial atheist out of Ingersoll and Bradlaugh.

172

I agree with almost all Mencken says in his denunciation of plutocratic influence

on our newspapers, etc., but I point to this solid fact: universal individual liberty—variety in the herd—began to flourish with the rise of plutocratic industrialism. There never was such a jangle of voices and ideas as exist in the world today. If money buys, remember also *that it liberates*.

173

"In America it is the Newspaper who is his—the inferior man's—boss." As a matter of fact, it is the inferior man—the crowd—that is the boss of the newspapers. Like the government, the newspaper is the mirror of his dreams and aspirations. It is the very armpit stench of the people.

The real creators of public opinion are the stomach, the weekly wage, the bank account, the price of eggs, the need of mass colonic irrigation, and rent, rent, rent.

174

Mencken never describes anything. He tears it to pieces and throws the parts in your face.

175

He has the illusion that the Wisest and Best will arise in a class (aristocratic) that will enjoy immunity from onslaughts "from above and below." Nothing worth a damn can come to life where there is immunity from onslaught: witness Mencken himself.

176

America, it seems to me, was invented for the amusement and mental mastication of just such epicureans of nonsense and stupidity as Mencken, Sinclair Lewis and myself. We hone our wit and our satire on its elephantine hide.

177

Man is a mystical-religious-emotional-instinctive animal, not a reasonable, rational or scientific animal. Mencken is no more reasonable, rational or scientific than I am or the Pope.

178

Mencken has only two organs of experience. The fulgurantly Aware Man has

three: the senses, the instincts and the apperceptive imagination, sometimes known as ethereal or cosmic consciousness.

179

He puts his finger squarely and surely on the eternal enemy of all superior men: women.

180

Why does he, a Brillat-Savarin of words, use over and over again such an ugly, clumsy, stupid, etymologically meaningless word as brummagem?

181

"The Anglo-Saxon mind, in these later days, becomes increasingly incapable of his [Conrad's] point of view." Thomas Hardy, the most inexorable and implacable pessimist and ironist that England has ever produced, was alive when this was written!—Hardy, a greater story-teller and a more original thinker than Conrad.

182

The astounding thing about Mencken's otherwise fine essay on Joseph Conrad is that he is always comparing Conrad and Dreiser and nowhere mentions Dostoievsky, from whom both obviously derive, although whereas Conrad is a variant of the great Russian, Dreiser is an imitator, and a poor one.

In spite of the great tom-toming for Conrad, he always will remain a second-rate writer and novelist for these reasons: he created no great and memorable character, because he had, like Dreiser has (and as Dostoievsky, Hardy, Tolstoy, Turgenev and Flaubert had not), a befuddled vision and a befuddled manner of expressing it; he devoted too much space to analysis instead of to character creation; he made the fatal mistake of exposing his workshop in every page; he paid more attention to the machinery of his own thought than to the vitality of the drama and the viability of his characters—they remain psychological exhibits encased in beautiful essays on the sea, the cosmos and causation; there is no air in his pages,

as there is none in Corot's canvases; his characters, his sea, his crimes, his intrigues are purely literary; he wrote with his eyes too close to the paper; and, finally, his irony, which should stand out stark and mighty in every page, is obscured by undoubted moralizings under cover of psychological finger-prodding. He lacked genius because of a too-brainy self-consciousness.

183

The charge is brought against Mencken—and there is considerable truth in it—that he is not "profound," that there is no inside works to his matter, that he deals only in surfaces. But why should a man who sees with such preternatural clarity the outsides of things and who reports what he sees in a style that magnifies the microscopic to startling proportions—why should he bother about the "insides," the "depths," etc.?

There are probably not one hundred thousand humans at any one moment in the history of this globe who live, move and have their being in some form of Reality.

184

Mencken's definition of "progress" is man's conquest of Nature ("The Nature of Art"). Poetry does not conquer Nature, does not face Nature, in fact, lies about her—hence no great "progress" is made with poetry. But Science conquers Nature; hence Science is "progress."

Here is the old cliché, "the conquest of Nature." Nature is not dual. The brain, knowledge and science are parts of Nature. Or does Mencken believe they are supernatural or non-natural, with miraculous implications?

Besides, since when has man "conquered Nature"? It is Nature that is always conquering man.

These superstitions and Glad Tidings of the scientific mind are on a par with "God and man are the eternal antagonists" ("The Nature of Art"). This is the old theological bunk that the soul is one thing and God another. Man is only antagonistic to God when he believes in free will, sin and all the rest of that stuff; and surely Mencken does not believe

in free will, sin, and the Fall? God and Man and Nature are one and the same thing.

1855

Never have I enjoyed such a wild, intellectual ride as I enjoyed with Mencken in his "Notes on Democracy." He is Tam o'Shanter, Mazeppa, Zarathustra! He is Bellerophon astride his own private Pegasus. He breathes fire, he dynamites, he throttles, he bombs from the air, he digs mines.

This book is indeed a great prose-poem. Mencken a poet!—yes, read his "Notes on Democracy" in one sitting and you will soon discover that it is all set to a wild, lawless rhythm. It sings, it soars, it flies, it chants, it vomits in perfect crescendos; it leaps, curves, bellows. I could saw any page of this superb book into free-verse lines. I could turn the whole book into a "Zarathustra," a prose-poem of hatred of the inferior man which might become the Bhagavad-Gita of democracy. Perpend:

> When Presbyterians step out of the grave
> Like chicks from the egg,

And wings blossom from their scapulæ
And they leap into interstellar space
With roars of joy.

Again I say no book like this, so infernally and venomously beautiful, has been born unto us since Victor Hugo's "Les Châtiments."

186

In "Painting and Its Critics" Mencken has done a job that the ages have waited for—put the painter, that eternal and nauseous moron, where he belongs. He is almost as low as the average "musician."

187

He is not a critic at all. He is an advocate, a prosecuting attorney. But he will not take a case unless he believes in it so thoroughly that he spits on his hands, rolls up his sleeves and splits the table with his seidel.

188

If I thought, with Mencken, that Hæckel, Mendel, Darwin, Weismann,

Tyndall, Einstein, Loeb, Virchow and the rest of the New Theology crowd were of greater importance in the world than Sophocles, Beethoven, El Greco, Rodin, Shakespeare, Robinson Jeffers, Cabell, or Mencken himself, I'd end it all. The human race "progresses" not by facing facts but by lying about them. I proclaim Man the Transcendental Everlasting Liar!

189

Will Mencken ever have the courage to turn tail on himself if there should ever occur in him a revolution of thought? How he clings to his idols! What a tremendous feeling of relief, of expansion, of "progress" in myself when I tossed Darwin, Huxley and Hæckel off my back, when I discovered that Science is a branch of plumbing and that Logic is the God of bricklayers!

190

How thoroughly and concretely he is a polemist, a pamphleteer, a social satirist and mocker becomes instantly visible when he starts to write of purely æsthetic matters, the arts, etc. The grand style, the tidal-wave of

battering words and the paroxysms of indignation leave him. Here he plainly flounders around in a world not realized. The only way he can yank himself clear, in these instances, of declining into a Wackford Squeers-Glenn Frank style is to keep his eye rivetted on the American scene—the face of Calvin Coolidge or the dome of the Capitol. Presto!—he is the real Mencken again! And though he write about composition in Turner's canvases or the condition of the semicolon in Chaucer's time he will lay down his pen ever and anon to insert a good solid coprolite aimed at a Y.M.C.A. secretary or the Methodist Vatican.

191

I throw up my hat—and incidentally point to Mencken's innate fairness and courage in turning on an old friend when he discovers that that friend is a jackass—over his castigation of Mark Twain ("Progress") for ridiculing all that is fine and beautiful—the paintings of Titian, the music of Wagner, etc.

I never could stomach "The Innocents Abroad" rubbish. Mark was the

atheist Babbitt of his time—and a coward and pharisaical blackguard to boot.

192

I put my finger on Mencken and think, Now I've got him! Nix! He's thumb-loose and at my back like a flitterwee. I've found his æsthetic—it's a kind of mechanistic realism. Nix! I find something on another page that shouts the glory of Swinburne's "Atalanta." Now I've got you!—you're just a logician! Liar!, shouts Henry—and I read in "The Iconoclast" this: "the shallowness of logic, the refuge of fools."

How stupid to try to "explain," to anatomize any one as complex as a modern! It's a game at which we all lose; but the game! —it's an Olympian sport.

193

"The Iconoclast" contains only twenty-two lines ("Prejudices: Fourth Series"), but it is the greatest essay on criticism I have ever read. It contains all ye need to know. It is a Magna Charta, a Declaration, a Marseillaise!

Mencken smashes in a few lines the whole Bottom-bred doctrine of "constructive criticism." Over the New Thélème I would carve these words of Mencken:

> THE LIBERATION OF THE HUMAN MIND HAS BEEN FURTHERED BY GAY FELLOWS WHO HAVE HEAVED DEAD CATS INTO SANCTUARIES AND THEN WENT ROISTERING DOWN THE HIGHWAYS OF THE WORLD.

And I would carve this over the barroom in the New Thélème:

> ONE HORSE-LAUGH IS WORTH TEN THOUSAND SYLLOGISMS.

194

"The last he [the artist] wants to see is a beautiful woman in the bright, pitiless sunlight." Fudge! What about Toulouse-Lautrec, Degas, Goya, Manet, Van Gogh, Max Weber, Walt Kuhn, etc.? In fact, there seems to be a perfect mania among almost all mod-

erns, and many ancients, to turn the beautiful into the ugly, not only to stand beautiful things in the pitiless sunlight but to bemerde them in the bargain.

195

Sound doctrine in "The Good Citizen as Artist" where he lambastes the pants off of those writers who say that they must abandon doing good work because they have a wife and children to support.

I should have been happy to hear that Shelley had starved to death twenty children and tossed ten wives and his father and mother into the Thames in order to write "Prometheus Unbound." Bernard Shaw says he made his mother wash the floors for him (she should have scrubbed George instead). Poe, rightly, milked every one for his support.

As a matter of fact, there is nothing big at all in these cry-babies who hide behind their wives' skirts and the children's cradles. If there is great stuff in you there is no power but death or paresis that can prevent it coming out.

196

America is the egg that laid the golden goose for Mencken.

197

Criticism in him is both objective and subjective. Sometimes they are both perfectly fused, subjective prejudice spurting from some hidden well of ancestral taste and striking with unerring approval some man's work which is absolutely foreign to his own—Cabell's, for instance. His objectivity is always evident in his reservations on things—writers, men, ideas, experiences—which, to use his own words, "escape him."

Fundamentally subjective—and therefore a poet at bottom—he battles valiantly against the shameful thing to no good purpose. He strives to see the world as *it is*, men and books as *they are*. Hopeless!—for there is, strictly speaking, no such thing as objective criticism or an objective world.

But we can approximate objectivity by the constant practice of dissociation. When an atheist of the Hæckel-Sinclair Lewis

type, for instance, can go wild with enthusiasm over Francis Thompson's "The Hound of Heaven," then "objectivity" has reached its apogee. But is there such an instance? Can Mencken dissever perfection of form and emotional sublimity from content? It is hard for him to do so, so he remains "objective" by his courageous statement so often made, "Frankly, that escapes me."

I test a scientific, non-religious man's critical faculties by his reaction to those two very great poems, "The Hound of Heaven" and "The Battle Hymn of the Republic."

198

"If He could perfect the hip joint and the ear, then why did He boggle the teeth?" This is no whit more intelligent than a saliva-drooling Methodist yowling at a Methodist camp-meeting, "I know that my Redeemer liveth!"

199

"Almost every day theology gets another blow from science." And almost

every day science gets another blow from science.

Now, theology is "the science of God" and science is the knowledge of our ignorance about both.

200

"Reflections on the Drama" reveal a side to Mencken that must make the most hardened of his admirers blubber salty, salty tears. For here is a terrible mess! He assaults the drama on the ground that, it being a democratic art, it is all rubbish. He might do the same with music—but he doesn't. Because the swine listen to Beethoven, Brahms and Bach over the radio—out with B.B.B.!—to hell with them! Gershwin, Berlin and Remick write music—to the can, then, with Mozart and Chopin!

In this essay Mencken lambastes Hamlet, Ibsen and Strindberg. These are not "reflections" on the drama; they are exhibitions on the drama. But, again, while goddamning him, I am pleasingly amazed at his furious pedal-work.

201

On a moving waterspout of words he carries the débris of God's Own Country. He is always searching for the word that sears. Many of them are like hot dies rammed on our brains by a verbal Vulcan.

202

What a delight it is to come on Mencken when he lets loose! For instance, in his glorification of Thomas Henry Huxley on the occasion of the centennial of his birth in 1925. And there is not a word in this Magnificat that should not be there. Life is almost justified when it produces a Huxley. And something of his hero has passed into Mencken.

203

"Evidences of divine incompetence and stupidity. The world is not actually well run; it is very badly run." How did Mencken find that out? Incompetent, stupid and badly run compared to what? Why, an ideal in Mencken's brain. And whence this ideal?

No greater evidence of Zeus' existence is needed than Prometheus' rebellion against the Boss Olympian; no greater evidence of God's existence is needed than Lucifer's dissatisfaction with Him.

When and where did God ever contract with Mencken or any one else to invent a competent and wise universe or one that is well run? Be good enough, Henry, to give God ideas and ability above the foreman of a plumbers' supply factory.

When Mencken says the world is "badly run," he means it isn't run to suit him. It doesn't suit me either, and yet Spinoza is right: *the world is perfect*. When Mencken has achieved the unhuman intelligence of Spinoza, Jules de Gaultier and myself he will abandon such rubbish as this: "Every reflective first year medical student must notice a hundred ways to improve it [the human body]."

204

What astounds me about Mencken is that he has got to read, for instance, *all* the books that Thorstein Veblen wrote in order to find out what sort of a corpse Veblen was in

his lifetime. Can't Mencken smell? I knew Karl Marx after I had read two pages of *Das Kapital*. Mencken has no antennæ; he has no second sight. I tremble for him when I think that he will some day set out to read *all* of Doc. Jay Nock in order to get his weight.

205

Nothing shows the Menckenian *flair* for hokum better than the way he pounced on George Bernard Shaw—"the Ulster Polonius"—away back in 1919. He cuts him down to the quick of his Scotch Presbyterian soul.

To unhorse Shaw one must have the fine gift of never confusing guano with poundcake. Shaw more than any writer who has lived knows the art of making the first look like the second.

THE ANATOMY OF GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

You clean men as you clean milk-pails, by scalding them.

—George Bernard Shaw.

I

THE FARCEUR

EORGE BERNARD SHAW, like the immortality of the soul, the inhabitability of Mars and Barnum's undying sucker, is always apropos as a theme of discussion.

Wars cannot wither nor capitalism stale the infinite variety of his didoes. This is mainly because Shaw's mouth is open twenty-four hours a day. Even when he sleeps he snores words.

After having evicted from his body some 5,000,000 to 10,000,000 words by means of books, lectures, the radio, plays, prefaces and syndicated articles, he is now incarnated in the movietone, where those of us who have never met this fifth carbon copy of

Voltaire face to face can see the hierophantic words actually spout out of his mouth, that Cave of the Winds entirely surrounded by a satanic simper.

In spite of all the millions of melodious, meticulous and cootie-pointed words that he has let loose on the planet, I do not consider Shaw a great writer or a thinker at all. He is, in fact, a great comedian and impersonator. He sometimes reminds me of Joe Cook, sometimes of Ed Wynn, and sometimes—in his neatness and clarity—of Beatrice Lillie.

I say I do not—cannot—look on Shaw as a great writer or a thinker. No matter what I pick of his—play, essay, or Socialistic yawp—I never feel that I am going to read, but that I am looking at an actor dressing for a part. Infinitely amusing? I'll say so! But original, to be taken seriously? Well, who does? Not even George Bernard Shaw. He says, "I am a mountebank." He has the brain of a juvenile Machiavelli superposed on a cry-baby, philistine, middle-class soul.

He is supremely the master of his impersonations, and also of his ability to clown great ideas borrowed from Aristophanes

to Ibsen. His receptivity, memory and ability to mimic others comically is, like all great actors, enormous. He has jazzed up La Rochefoucauld, Schopenhauer, Samuel Butler, Nietzsche, Tolstoy, Wilde, Ibsen and Wagner for popular consumption.

He is thus to the world of ideas what Paul Whiteman and George Gershwin are to the world of great music. Even a hasty glance through his two pounds of words on Socialism will convince any one, I think, that he is now Karl Marx gone Mack Sennett.

He was rehearsing for this Guide to Socialism when on his seventieth birthday he announced in a somewhat sob-sisterly manner, "Karl Marx made a man of me!" It was the fanfare to that mysterious "last will and testament to the human race" (fancy that, Hedda!) that came to us chock-full of soap-box bromides and anti-capitalistic yowls played on a saxaphone for "intelligent women" (*sic*).

The heart of the "will and testament" is that Shaw, having yanked about $2,000,000 out of our pockets, and having employed capitalistic lawyers in every corner of

the globe to protect his copyrights, now kindly asks us to equalize our incomes! I have heard nothing more ripping, my word!, since the late Aubrey Boucicault offered, one night, to exchange his suspenders and his cuff-links for an Airedale pup at "Jack's" bar.

That my income shall be no more and no less than my ice-man's is the final joke, I hope, of this windy wag, who began his waggeries by declaring that the Wagnerian "Ring" operas were an argument for Socialism.

That there is nothing new or original in this equality-of-income idea goes without saying. It has been advocated since Cain slugged Abel over the head for refusing to divide his lamb stew with him.

Equality of income has always been the social program of every incompetent bum on the planet, not to speak of counterfeiters and second-story gunmen.

This idea of group-organized theft must have got into the fantastic skull of Shaw when he was one of the under literary dogs of London, in the days when he tramped the art galleries for a mere nothing. As he was,

and is, too meticulously honorable and honest a man ever to turn Cain or Jesse James on his own, he resorted to the old psychological trick of making a "humanitarian ideal" of his wholly admirable desire to clamber up and out of the hell-pits of poverty.

Having by sheer hard work raised himself to the millionaire level, he sticks to his guns. Equality of income is now his fixed idea, just as Bryan's was once bimetalism, then Prohibition, and finally Darwin conceived as the Anti-Christ.

Shaw has somewhere an epigram to the effect that when an Englishman wants to do something wrong he invents a sublime moral reason for doing it and then does it. This is exactly what has happened to Shaw. Once wanting something very badly, as most of us do —i.e., money—he invented an "ethical principle" to cover the most brazenly conceived program of legalized pickpocketry that I know of.

If he is really serious about this, then he has no more brains than that other great modern prophet who has declared all history and art to be bunk. But as Shaw unques-

tionably has brains, of a kind, I prefer to laugh out loud publicly at what Shaw is laughing at secretly—that millions of Crô-Magnons take him seriously.

Recall Tolstoy and you will get something of the mental make-up of Shaw. Tolstoy after he advocated absolute celibacy for the human race begat children. He later posed as a peasant, but wore the finest of silk underwear under his blouse. And I have it on the word of the late James G. Huneker that he saw the famous Russian advocate of vegetarianism eat a meat sandwich *sub rosa*.

In a word, Shaw is practicing the old Jesuitical game of an esoteric and an exoteric doctrine—a rule for you and me and a private one for himself; for no man more completely safeguards his great fortune than Shaw, and no one, I'll wager, would make a bitterer fight against dividing it up with me.

Nothing, to me at least, more clearly indicates the steady retrogression of the human race toward its simple communistic origins and the dissolution of the healthy struggle for power—its growing fatigue—than this Shavian doctrine of "let us all go whacks."

Shaw having stood the gaff like a man when he was poorly paid, now grows blubberingly sentimental and patronizing toward those who haven't the brains, the cleverness, the shrewdness and the prehensility that he has.

Millions of us for years have listened to the miracle-cant from the mouth of the shrewdest mountebank, the most superficial of sentimental idealists, the best second-hand tasteless wit and the most nauseatingly self-publicized actor of which I have any knowledge.

As one who used to be one of the most entertaining of modern playwrights, Shaw knows his technique: he is master of situation, surprise, entry, exits, and, above all, of climaxes. He himself is an uproarious slap-stick clown in a one-part Shavian comedy.

But he can never be great because his humor is not tragic.

II

THE HIGHER THIEVERY

THERE is no belief so preposterous that it will not find rabid defenders. The more absurd and preposterous the more fanatical the defense. It is only common sense, the obvious, that has no adherents.

The history of all moralistic and social propagandists from the earliest times to Tolstoy, Bryan and Shaw is the history of crackbrains. The doctrine of Shaw that equality of income will bring about a social Utopia is on a par with the attempt to extract sunbeams from cucumbers, gold from sea water, and the belief of Dowie and Voliva that the earth is flat (the latter have made fortunes out of this doctrine, just as Shaw does out of his Piltdown piffle).

"Cannot anybody be serious in discussing economic problems?," asks Joseph Dana Miller. Yes, of course; but not with a capitalistic hypocrite like Shaw, who advocates forcible pickpocketry after he has amassed and safeguarded a vast fortune. I would take Shaw

seriously if he followed the command of the greatest of all Socialists, who said, "Sell that thou hast, and give to the poor . . . and follow me." Shaw would greet this with his usual satanic simper and coin a defensive paradox.

Shaw is handing fire to mush-heads and promulgating stupid social doctrines that have no foundation in nature, psychology or common sense to the failures, the half-baked and the venomous incompetents of the world. I treat Shaw in the only way a sham, a faker, and an advocate of group-theft should be treated—with ridicule.

But I will answer my critics seriously, not for Shaw's sake but to prove that, unlike Shaw, one may smile and smile and yet be able to think.

Equality of any kind—physical, mental or social—is impossible. I assert that not only is equality of income inconceivable but I deny the possibility of any human being conceiving equality of any kind. So long as there exists a difference between any two given things, whether in size, form or color, whether it is between two zebras or two zodiacs, there will be inequality. There are no two

things exactly alike in every particular in the world.

From this flows the law of inequality of birth, opportunity and income. What reason, then, have we to believe that this law of the inherent difference or inequality of things can be abrogated by a legislative or social fiat which says, "Let all incomes be equally distributed?"

Whence the difference in individual incomes? Is it not from the differences of individual rights? And whence the difference in individual rights? Is it not from the differences of character, temperament and native intelligence or physical strength? Hence the difference in income comes from differences that plunge their roots to the basis of life. John Jones gets $6 a week and Sam Jones gets $6,000 a week. Each is getting exactly what he is worth to society, although Sam Jones may be a thief within or without the law (there is no difference), for Sam Jones is a superior being in that he either possesses less conscience than John Jones or he is superiorly endowed by nature for the struggle for existence. He is giv-

ing more service (to use Shaw's jargon) than John.

Shaw talks miracle-cant (like all reformers and ameliorists) when he tells us that an act of Parliament can do by decree what all natural and psychological laws are opposed to. He has transferred the mantle of divinity from the shoulders of kings to the shoulders of "Be it enacted." It is our friend "divine right" in another mask, now claiming, most naturally, among its worshippers the most superficial and mass-minded of all modern writers.

The public wants to read Shaw and, maybe, does not want to read me—therefore his social service is greater than mine. It is therefore quite right that Shaw should get $1,000 for an article for which I would be paid only $100. When I demand that Congress or Parliament should enact a law equalizing Shaw's pay with mine or mine with his I become *particeps criminis* in an act of confiscation. It is group-theft—today the commonest form of theft—whether it wear the guise of income tax, old age pensions or a minimum wage law. But I am not yet a crook disguised as

a humanitarian. If I have more value than Shaw, I should prove it.

Nothing so humiliates an able man as to find that an incompetent one is getting the same pay. Nothing embitters him more. Wearing the benevolent and besotted smile of human brotherhood, he becomes secretly a wire puller, a "grafter" and a "wolf" *sub-rosa*. This is one of the results of "equality of income" as I have observed it in the ranks and not from the Shavian papier-maché ivory tower of the sociological highbrow.

In Shaw's book (as in the argument of every sentimental bungler and mob-muddied thinker) all history is ignored, all experience is thrown away or pooh-poohed out of court. Psychological laws are myths. A man is to be made a better man by giving him more money to spend, is the burden of Shaw's argument. Could any one imagine anything triter, more threadbare, more hopelessly platitudinous, mustier or staler than an argument founded on that premise! How is it to be done? Presto! Levy on the rich, 'tis done! Is he talking to idiots? Yes—and Shaw knows it.

Men do not want equality of any kind—least of all equality of income. They want power over other individuals. This is a profound and unshakable psychological law. Shaw's own doctrine is camouflaged will-to-power.

No strong man, no real man, no man with guts and brains wants to be equalized in his income with any one else. All men are born unequal, and the battle will be always to the strongest and the race to the swiftest, no matter how sharp the giant gelding knife of Socialism becomes or how great the intermittent power of such group-predatory sentimentalists as George Bernard Shaw, superficially a dungaree Mephisto, but in his soul of souls a Cromwell and a social Borgia.

But I howl in vain. The world is going into a parasitic, feministic, deindividualized epoch. Whether it is Mussolini, Shaw, communistic Russia, a rapidly socializing Germany or France, or a federalized America, character and individuality wither everywhere, and in their place we behold the march of robots and State slaves.

Onward, State-pimps!

III

"DEMENTIA PARADOX"

NO ONE has enjoyed the thin wit of Shaw more than I have. But I have noticed it is quickly forgotten, and no one ever—or seldom—quotes Shaw. His wit doesn't pin itself on the brain. In fact, it is brainless.

Another peculiar phenomenon I have noted in regard to my consistent attendance at all the Shaw plays since that afternoon at the Princess Theater when Arnold Daly (whom Shaw was to congratulate twenty-three years after in a brutal epigram on the occasion of Daly being burned to an unrecognizable mass) put on "Candida" is that it is only with the greatest mental effort that I can recall what any one of his plays was about an hour after leaving the theater. It was something that amused me enormously at the moment, made me believe I was getting an important and original revelation, and after it was all over I found that I had nothing more in my skull-pan than the water of a thrice-juggled egg.

Feeling that something was wrong with me, as Shaw—by Gar!—has pronounced himself one of the profoundest, most brilliant and most original of thinkers and playwrights, I read the plays. Same impression—of page after page going to pieces in my hands as I turned them, of characters which by no dint of will would remain alive in my brain, of paradoxes and epigrams carefully paraphrased from the sayings of La Rochefoucauld, Chamfort, Napoleon, Schopenhauer, Strindberg, Wilde, Ibsen, Nietzsche and Samuel Butler.

He was like an onion that I was continually peeling to get at the center, only to find it all peel, and no center. Here was a vacuity of thought, I had finally to conclude, entirely surrounded by a movie satanic grin. Here is a man, I whispered to myself for fear of being mobbed, who is essentially dull, proper, simperingly charming, and soulless, who has resolved to become a devil-of-a-fellow in literature.

Above all, he is a money-mad capitalistic soul (almost all his letters in years agone, I am told, are about money, money, money; but this is not inconsistent with his

philistine socialism, for did you ever hear of a socialist who wasn't money-mad, a tight-wad and sometimes a Shylock to boot?)—a money-mad capitalistic soul, I whispered into my pocket. Some day he is going to bring a Great Boon to the human race—watch!, I said to myself—at so much per. Like Victor Hugo, Charles Dickens and the Catholic Church, he is going to make a vast fortune out of pitying the human race, as Edgar Saltus said about some one else.

Then came "Saint Joan." I felt disappointed in this play when I saw it. Aside from his cheap hamfatting of one of the most mysterious and dramatic beings that ever took on flesh on this planet (I am not for reverence, remember, but am strong for dramatic integrity and æsthetic taste), I could not just exactly touch the spot where Shaw failed as Shaw.

The truth and Shaw ring false when juxtaposed—that's it!, I thought with the muffled silence of a soap-bubble bursting in Oblivion, for Heywood Broun, the greatest dramatic critic that God has yet sent on earth, had pronounced "Saint Joan" the greatest play of the age; which, of course, would have been

absolutely true if "Saint Joan" had been the only play written during the age.

Now, I contend, in view of the great glee that the Shavian soul exhibits before the toasting alive of human beings that he should have had Joan's burning played in the center of the stage and had her wisecrack the Inquisition, the King and the English while her legs were being pretty well browned.

And in the epilogue to "Saint Joan," some four hundred years later in modern dress, why did he not have Arnold Daly (who first made Shaw possible in this country) on the stage and have the latter say:

"Well, Joan, I've got one on you, old dear! Shaw will manufacture a clever line at my toasting; but you get nothing!"

Every play that Shaw has written, including "Saint Joan"—the historic tragic ending of which hurt his sentimental, Karl-Marxy nature so deeply that he invented, as I have pointed out, a middle-class All-is-not-lost! epilogue—every one of his plays ends happily, just like the novels of Harold Bell Wright, the poems of Eddy Guest and the plays of Mr. Hodge. Far more amusing and keen-witted, I

grant you; but in texture and background the same.

Shaw always seems—sly doggy!—to be offending Respectability. He always seems—cunning puss-puss!—to be hacking the conventions to shreds. But, in reality, he puts them all back in their niches again at the end of the play.

For this Our Saint Bernard is the very pith, vertebra and navel of Respectability: a vegetarian, non-drinker, non-smoker, sex-puritan, home-body, sure-fire money-maker, uplifter, a culture-hound, autoscopist, sob-sister idealist and radio Satan, for the amusement of the British children and the Elder Papoosery. In a word, a sweet Arcadian who plays many rôles in his self-organized, one-part company of amateur theatricals, the latest play being, "Equality of Income; or, Picking One Another's Pockets." He is healthy (*laus Deo!*) except for one constitutional blemish—"Dementia paradox," as Big Bill Thompson calls it.

Some weeks before the Shaw movietone made its appearance on Broadway I said in *The World* that Shaw never gave me the impression of being a writer or a thinker,

that I always pictured him as an actor, using the word in the sense of insincerity and hypocrisy. I was not surprised, then, to see Shaw appear on the screen giving an imitation of Mussolini. He even gave an imitation of Shaw —an imitation of an imitation.

I ask all who have not seen Shaw in the movies to read the stenographic report of his speech that went the rounds of the newspapers. Here is a man who is commonly acclaimed "the outstanding figure in the literary world of today" making his first appearance in America, and, besides, to millions of persons throughout the world. You would think, naturally, that he would try to say something brainy, clever, serious, or at least intelligible. But if there ever emanated more stuttering, stammering, unintelligible lobscouse from the lips of a human being, I'd like to hear it. It shows me that the man is lost when he is away from his scrapbooks and library.

Shaw, as I have said, is a money-mad individual; a man who has a property-right instinct as profound as was Russell Sage's; a man who has by the grace of capitalistic laws and a capitalistic civilization amassed several

million dollars by giving the world something that is utterly superfluous in the struggle for existence—plays; a man who hurries to bank all his money with a swiftness that Ford and Schwab—those dreadful "Enemies of Society!"—must smile at; a man who engages capitalistic lawyers all over the globe to protect his copyrights; a man who does not give his plays to the world to be acted everywhere and "for the general good" (the blessed General Good of Socialist Shaw), but farms them out to monopolistic play organizations; a man who worships the Golden Calf beyond any other God (his life preoccupation with "income," "rent," "salaries" and other such economic slop would indicate this)—in a word, Shaw after "getting his" by methods which he pronounces "social thievery," now calmly proposes that we shall abolish the present competitive system and organize a society wherein every one will receive the same income. Aside from the preposterous and idiotic nature of this proposition and its advocacy of public pickpocketry by act of Parliament, it reveals Shaw as the most consummate demagogue and hypocritical sensa-

tion-monger of his time—all of which are implicit in his plays.

His plays, besides—analyze them closely—reek with sentimentality. He is ashamed of this, so he glozes it over with Borgian poisons purloined from the sources I have named. But, like all sentimentalists, he is cruel and hypocritical, and, like all Borgians, the "humanitarian" tear-bag waters the satanic sneer.

IV

THE GREAT RACKETEER

MUST write a book entitled "Individualism: An Intelligent Man's Guide to Escape the Coming Industrial and Moral Enslavement by the State" as an antidote to Shaw's "An Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism."

One of Shaw's disciples does not believe that if Shaw started to divide his ill-gotten wealth (I use the jargon of socialists in describing those who have accumulated millions under the capitalistic system, as Shaw has) it would change by one iota the economic order. It would by many iotas. It would be one of the sublimest gestures ever made. But publicity, not sublimities, is in Saint Bernard's line. One should live one's own philosophy. Shaw lives one philosophy and preaches another. I name, haphazard, some of the men who have lived their own philosophy: Socrates, Epicurus, Buddha, Jesus, the Stoics, Nero, Spinoza, St. Francis of Assisi, Debs, Henry George, Montaigne, D'Annunzio, Thoreau, Whitman, Kropotkin,

Blake, Casanova, Stendhal, Havelock Ellis, Gœthe, Bruno, Napoleon, Tom Paine, Oscar Wilde, Ibsen, Lincoln, Attila, Bismarck, Garibaldi, Robert Emmet, Victor Hugo, Big Bill Haywood and Isadora Duncan.

Compare the lives of these persons with the smug, publicity-crazed and money-mad Shaw. He condemns a whole social system and uses every art and ruse to turn the condemned system to his own uses: self-exploitation and the amassing of vast personal wealth at the expense of the "common hoard" (I drop into socialistic jargon again); the use of every capitalistic device to wring money out of the public; flagrant and flaunting apostasy to his own creed, like a dry-wet. An individualist, he advocates socialism. He advises against thrift and is notoriously thrifty. He teaches equality of income, but he will not divide with Barrie, Molnar, St. John Ervine or O'Neill.

"Social worth" seems to be the standard of a man according to the Shavian socialists. All man's worth is individual. "Social worth" is an abstract phrase. Every human being is an egotist, a self-seeker. His "worth" develops in inverse ratio to his "social worth."

Man is a gregarious but not a social animal. He herds for what he can get out of it. The family (the State at home) is the center of the most bitter and subtle wars. Every really great man is accused of being an enemy of society—and should be. Ethical standardization must follow industrial standardization as the shadow the body. Socialism is Robespierre and Torquemada piled on Karl Marx and Lenin. Only men who have no personal worth yammer about "social worth." It pays. It is a "racket"—especially in England and America.

Shaw is keen enough mentally to know this. "Equality of income" is now his "racket." He has not the courage of his convictions, and he is cock-sure he never will have. He is neither a Debs nor a Lenin. He is a "racketeer," like the Pope, Mussolini, Stalin, and the Methodist Church in America.

I admire Shaw for his capitalistic prehensility, his gorgeous success at "putting it over" and his audacious individualism; but I denounce him as a hypocrite and a cruel manipulator of weak and unanalytical minds. Shaw himself is a product of the competitive system—of war. He has lived, has thrived, on conflict.

What he really loves is Shaw and Success. Here I salute him. But take the mask off!

"Social justice!" is another slogan of the Shavians. There is not, can never be, any such thing. All "social justice" works to the detriment of the strong, the competent, the talented. One pound of individual guts and stamina is worth a thousand pounds of social theory and regimentation. Nineteen-twentieths of all the great men in the world have slugged their way out of the middle and lower classes under the monarchical and capitalistic systems. The strong must rule the weak or the weak will die. But socialism means the rule of collective might over individual might, which reverses all biological and natural laws. It will destroy the worth of the units in seeking a mythical collective worth.

All social laws should be an extension of natural, biological and psychological laws, not their reversal. The universe is not an abstraction; life is not an abstraction: it is infinite concrete variation. Try to standardize flesh and blood and the Law's revenge is swift and sure. It is the irony of history. French Revolutions breed Napoleons, Cromwells breed Nell

Gwyns, Lenin will breed a Russian Attila. There can thus never be a "scientific organization" of humanity for the simple reason that man is not a scientific creature—he is not a cube, a theorem, a book of mathematics, but a living, vital, warring, covetous, envious, obscene egomaniac. Only two classes of persons seek to put him in a social or moral straitjacket: "racketeers" like Shaw and Mussolini or sentimental fanatics like Lenin and Bryan.

The great men in "the coming slavery," as long-sighted Herbert Spencer called it, will be those who will be the enemy of the socialistic state (and who will be duly shot to death by the sentimental Robespierres of Socialism). The only service a State ever performs is to breed its enemies (Emersons, Thoreaus, Whitmans, great dissenting individuals). The man who wants to be the "equal" of another man is always the inferior man. Laudable attempt if he does not do it by forcibly dragging down to his level the superior man, as socialism and communism will attempt to do, with hideously ironic results.

Shaw's whole scheme is the creation of a State that has a patented scheme for

picking the weak man's chestnuts out of the fire without the latter burning his own fingers. The strong man reaches in and takes a chance.

Shaw ought to know that all evolution is toward greater and greater differentiation, variety and conflict. Variety, not standardization, is the law of life. Shaw is a "throw-back" because his programme is a return to unity and standardization—and thus spiritual, mental and moral death.

Socialism is the opposite of individualistic democracy. The great State should aim at the ultimate disappearance of the State. It should foster individual freedom within the limits prescribed by Jefferson and Spencer.

The "Kingdom of God is within you" is the greater platform of the Individualist; but it will never arrive on earth because of the social "racketeers" and the sentimental fanatics, who ride us from everlasting to everlasting.

V

JOHN *BULL* II

EORGE BERNARD SHAW is a vegetarian. He neither smokes nor drinks. Sexually, he is a disciple of the Uranian Venus and confesses he was a virgin until 29.

He is a rare phenomenon, a unique phenomenon, for among playwrights and wits he is the only ascetic that I can recall.

Physiologically and psychologically, the artist and the ascetic are contradictory terms. The artist may have ascetic periods, like Flaubert, Poe and Balzac, for the purpose of doing some specific thing in a specified time, but these are only brakes on the plunging and earth-soaked senses and appetites, from which all artists draw their creative forces.

The history of genius is the history of colossal dissipations. The creative imagination is Bacchic and Venusan. It spouts white and red fire. It steams and simmers and delights in the amoral senses. The artist is a dissolute rowdy, feeding and stimulating his

creative cerebral glands from the flowing bowls of sensuous and sensual delights.

Mighty lovers, mighty drinkers, mighty eaters—even soldiers and slayers of men—creatures generally of excess, often drug-users, sometimes sexually oblique: the true artist, the genius, the poet, is a veritable Sardanapalus of erotic and vinous frenzy, whether his name be Horace or Æschylus, Gœthe or Victor Hugo, Poe or Wagner, Strindberg or Verlaine, Byron or Rimbaud, Baudelaire or Dostoievsky, Villon or Walt Whitman, Molière or Shakespeare, Swinburne or Goya.

The "Vices" are the seed of the Church of Art.

Asceticism is proper to reasoning machines, cold-blooded philosophers, thin-lipped social and religious propagandists and bloodless scientists. You cannot be intoxicated and reason; but you can be intoxicated and create. In fact, you must be drunk to create. The very principle of creation is intoxication, ecstasy, the dethronement of reason.

The artist—the real artist—is therefore in the unobstructed stream of biological law; he is, like the lover, like the begetter,

a ravisher, a spender, a frenzied, ecstatic wonderman laboring on the belly of the earth to the wild music of the hidden Pan. He must be always on the road to or on the road coming from the Venusberg or the Dionysan revels. If he become ascetic at times it is to breed in his skull-prison more potently sensual dreams and to gather his forces for a more savage descent on life.

The orgiastic demon follows fatally in the footsteps of those ordered to create —I speak of genius only—whether it be music, with brush, with pen or with chisel.

Isadora Duncan is a modern incarnation of this orgiastic soul of the world which so few capture and which so many must not look upon. I do not speak of her dancing, but of her life. It was her life, not her dances, that rang with the demonic music of Pan, of which the antics and the epigrams and the audacities of George Bernard Shaw are the counterfeit. For Shaw is a Puritan who missed the Mayflower by five minutes.

The vulgar audacity and brilliant brutality of Shaw must not be confounded with Nietzscheanism or Dionysan supermanity.

He is, essentially, an introverted blubberer, as all Irishmen are, and a pacifist-idealist. But he has always been ashamed of it. Shame fabricates masks automatically. A quick audacity and a direct brutal speech are seldom natural. They are the manufactured bluffs to hide fearsome mental nail-biting.

Lift the crust of Shaw's brilliant camouflage and there remains a reformer, an uplifter, a manufacturer of social, political and literary straitjackets of the most approved Anglo-Saxon type.

His brain is a half-inch layer of champagne poured over a bucket of Methodist near-beer.

The effect of having lived a rigidly moral and abstemious life is apparent in all his plays and in the endless, stupefying, vacuous, old-maidish garrulity of the man. His plays are magnificently dressed show-windows with no store behind them. His ideas never fuse with life. Almost all his characters are merely verbal, not actual, contradictions of one another. The drama in the play is merely verbal, never character conflict. His epigrams do not flow out of character; but, on the contrary, the

characters slide thinly and enæmically out of the epigrams.

He has been the greatest disaster that the English-speaking stage has encountered in this century, for, being the father of all the sophisticated drool that passes for real drama, he has set back the stage a whole generation in its normal evolution out of its Victorian swaddlings. In America only Eugene O'Neill and George Kelly have survived the blight of Shaw.

Shaw is thus neither an artist nor a genius. He is not an artist because he cannot create vital, pulsing humans, because he has no personal sensation of eternals (he has only epigrams about the eternal and the infinite), because he is devoid of all poetry, because his æsthetic sense is subordinate to and in the service of his sentimental propagandist impulses, and because he is not a serious, a tragic humorist (like Cervantes, Strindberg, Shakespeare and Daumier, for instance).

He is not a genius by a star-shot, though my ear is always being dinned with the phrase "the genius of Bernard Shaw."

In the first place, genius is pro-

foundly serious, never more so than when it is Puck or Gargantua. But Shaw is even suspect in his sincerity in his socialism, for nothing but senility or cheapjack joking could have produced the book called "An Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism" and its advocacy of an equal division of all income. In this book we see how dull Shaw is, fundamentally, when he is "original" and when he no longer has the thinkers and wits of the past to draw on.

The minute he swears off the champagne of paradox the flat near-beer begins to assail our nostrils.

Among the groundlings of literary criticism nothing is more easily confused than genius and a clever talent for legerdemain. A genius is never outmoded, never dated. Shaw is already past. It is for this reason his speeches and opinions command so much attention today: he has become a bearded wiseacre, a farmers' almanac of predictions, a classic like Confucius, and as redundant.

Who was it said of Shaw that he was the funny man in a vegetarian-teetotal boarding-house? Which brings me around to the real circus qualities of this international

humorist, who in his own field of audacity, brutality and pistol-fire wit is highly entertaining.

First of all, there is that wonderful satanic simper. Let me analyze this Shavian satanic pose.

Satan has, of course, passed away forever from the earth. It is probable that Rasputin was His Majesty's last representative on this footstool—a belated incarnation. All of us are moralists now—even the nihilists, atheists and communists. All world-leaders today are aiming at the "regeneration of humanity." There never was a time in the history of the world when so many dictatorial crackpots were willing to take all kinds of paying jobs to uplift the race. In the Car of Progress, God (the Individual) has been shoved into the rumble-seat. Neros and Borgias are gone. This is the era of the moralic mask. Everybody "means well." Everybody is "saving" somebody else. Those of us who still survive with individual psyches live, on sufferance, between engineering Smugmugs and snooty economic Christs.

Shaw is the worst-bitten of the whole tribe. He has always been a redemptorist, a puddler in world sores, a weepy-eyed, senti-

mental Betterment Buddy. But first of all he is a good showman. Never appear to be what you are. Never give away the works. Play the *fumiste* down to the ashes. Hence the cultivation of the satanic mask, the Mephistophelean simper, the Pan-locks and the slyly libidinous twinkle. Like nearly all the famous men of the age, he is an actor. He plays Satan—does this socialistic-sentimental Little Rollo. And he is the best actor on the world stage today, playing a splendid Diabolus to the ineffable Dio-Benito at Rome.

Exhibitionism is a universal law. It is the very core of all egoistic activity. It is the principle of individualization. We are all show-offs. Modesty and humility exhibit themselves in the mirror of secret self-satisfaction. We live in our mirrors: friends, relations, reputation, self-consciousness, pride, our private God —all are self-reflecting mirrors, before which we strut, smirk, shake hands with ourselves, kiss ourselves, and go through a thousand self-exhibitory antics.

Shaw is the most delightful specimen of Narcism in the world today. Dio-Benito is Narcism on Horeb: Shaw is Narcism

on a soapbox. He prinks and preens himself every morning in the sun of his self-ordained immortality and Posthumous Glory. "I am a greater dramatist than Shakespeare," he yawps while looking at himself in the pool of his self-complacency.

The Malvolio-Narcissus of a planet, he kisses his image in a thousand newspapers and magazines each morning and listens to his own voice go round the world as he bleats his blather over the radio and salutes himself in a thousand press clippings a day.

Was there ever such a lark! Was there ever such a clown? Was there ever such jackassery! Was there ever such noodle-nitty Narcism! If you were to read all that Shaw has written and said outside of his plays—I mean his endless opinions delivered on every conceivable topic—you would have made the greatest study of mental befuddlement extant. These so-called self-contradictions, paradoxes and inconsistencies are the result of a very small and narrow brain trying to digest all the knowledge in the world. His is really a single-track, one-idea (social regeneration) mind. Its assump-

tion of universality is naturally laughter-provoking.

Having surveyed Shaw from various angles, I now come back whence I started: the necessity of those who create—even though, as in the case of Shaw, they are not artists or geniuses—to keep drunk on something. Success, you may say, is the great intoxicant. But Shaw was stimulated, intoxicated by something before he became successful and, socialist-like, piled up an immense fortune, which is adequately protected on all sides by capitalistic legislation.

The Narcissan Ego, distended to the bursting point and filled with the wine of self-admiration, is the answer. This is his red roast-beef, his liquor, his sex-tease. He is auto-intoxicated, egovinous, reeling drunk on his own cleverness.

His soul is a still, a booze-vat, an ale-tap. This is superposed on a fixed idea, the fixed idea that made such splendid sober drunkards of Jesus, Karl Marx, John Wesley, Lenin, Bryan and Henry George: the I-am-a-savior complex.

I really believe that God each morning sits down at His desk, pencil in hand, waiting to get His orders from George Bernard Shaw.

Take these two things away from Shaw—the self-ravished Narcissan and the redeemer illusion—and there remains a clever and versatile ladies' smoking-room wise-cracker—nothing more.

Shaw professes to despise America. Yet not even Barnum or Theodore Roosevelt were more thoroughly American in blare, showmanship and monumental hokum than George Bernard Shaw—England's other John *Bull*.

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